AN EXAMINATION OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LEARNER DROPOUT IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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DECLARATION

I, Vele Tsumbedzo Maria, declare that this dissertation entitled, **AN EXAMINATION OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LEARNER DROPOUT IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS,** is my own work, and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Signature Vele T.M

Date 19/03/2015

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late father, Vho-France Mahanyele Vele and my mother Vho-Tshavhungwe Vele, for the part they played in my life, Father and Mother; you have been good to me. My husband, Tshifhiwa Bethuel Ramaisha, my two special sons, Elliot and Tshikhudo, and my two special daughters, Nyadzanga and Gundo, let me say to all of you, may our Lord be with you for the rest of your lives.

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ABREVIATIONS

ABET	: Adult Basic Education and Training
CRC	: Convention on the right of the child
DARE	: Drug Abuse Resistance Education
FET	: Further Education and Training
HIV and AIDS	: Human Immune Virus/ Acquired Deficiency Syndrome
HOD'S	: Head of Departments
MOESS	: Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
NAESP	: National Association of Elementary School Principal
NCES	: National Centre for Education Statistics
NGO's	: Nongovernmental Organization
NRC 1	: National Research Council and Institute of Medicine
NRCI	: National Research Council Institute
NSFAS	: National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SGB	: School Governing Boards
UNICEF	: United Nations Education Children's Fund / Children's Rights and Emergency Relief Organization
US	: United States of America

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the intervention strategies for learner drop-out in rural South African high schools at Tshilamba circuit in Limpopo province.The study adopted qualitative phenomenological research approach in which focus group interviews were conducted.Purposive sampling procedure was utilised to select 70 participants who comprised of 20 school learners, 20 school dropouts, 10 SGB members and 20 teachers from two schools in the Tshilamba rural community. The study found that there are there are various causes of learner drop-out which include lack of fees, poverty, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of parental monitoring, especially for those who stayed with grand-parents and in child-headed families. The study concludes that there are several intervention strategies that are being used to curb higher learners drop-out in South African high schools at Tshilamba circuit in Limpopo province. These strategies include amongst others creating a safe and friendly school environment, prevention programmes to curb teenage pregnancy, parental involvement in the education of their children, school capitation grant and school feeding scheme programmes, remedial education, abolition of corporal punishment, extramural and co-curricular activities, and provision of vocational guidance and counselling. The study recommends that awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate the learners and the community about the dangers of being uneducated citizens. The study also recommends that everywhere when people gather for any activity, such gathering should include in their agendas, campaigns against school drop-outs.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Learner drop-outs have remained a serious educational and social challenge for decades in rural South African high schools. When learners leave school before the set 12 year school period, they become school drop-outs. School drop-outs result in poor educational outcomes that diminish the economic and social life chances of an individual (Rumberger, 1997).

Whilst the problem of school drop outs is a serious problem in South African schools, it also affects even highly industrialised countries like Britain and the United States of America. According to statistics, America has the highest number of school drop outs. There are multiple factors that contribute to school drop outs, and these include, among other things, gender, race, ethnicity and family income differences (National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES), 2000). The NCES (2000) data show that 10 % of the US youth aged between 15 and 24 years dropped out of school in 2000. This translated to a loss of around three million students from school in the whole of the US. The same report indicates that racial differences in school drop-out rates were 6.9% for white, 3% for Asians, 13.15% for African-Americans and 27.8% for Hispanics (NCES, 2000).

Democratic South Africa ushered in an era of encouraging literacy in the nation. However, despite efforts to empower the previously marginalised black South Africans, the number of school drop outs still escalates. This could be as a result of negative attitudes towards apartheid education that marginalised black people. This can be seen in the number of boys who drop out of school as compared to girls. Boys are believed to be more politically agitated than girls, and still perceive that education is meant to perpetrate the colonial legacy (Serrao, 2007). It is further observed that most of the drop-outs in most South African public schools are boys and that economic consequences are a major reason for dropping out of high school (Serrao, 2007).

Research has shown that dropping out of school has a long lasting negative effect for both males and females. It promotes criminal activities largely on the part of males, and single parent households on the part of females. It may also increase the rate of prostitution amongst the youthful parents (NCES, 2000). It is further noted that school drop-outs tend to be more

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troubled0 emotionally, less confident in their own worth, have a lower self-esteem, lack a clearly defined self-image and a sense of identity, and have unstructured values on personal, social and occupational goals.

A number of studies indicate that teenage pregnancy tops the list of reasons why learners drop of school including, the desire to get a job, school failure, lack of individual or group counselling, the influence of out of school peers, lack of adequate resources, not relating the curriculum to employment plans, and clashes with school authorities (Runhare, 2010; Rumberger, 1997; Santrock, 1993; Steinberg, 1993). A study by Rumberger (1997) indicated that almost 50% of the drop-outs cited school related reasons such as not liking school, being suspended, or being expelled for leaving school, while 20% cited economic reasons for dropping out of school. Some students quit school to seek employment, in order to help support their families (Santrock, 1993).

The issue of school drop-outs has negatively affected South Africa and the rest of the world. This study therefore, seeks to investigate the interventions that may be employed to deal with this global socio-economic and political catastrophe. Kimmel and Welmer (1998) suggest that interventions to dealing with dropping out of school should focus on students' adjustment to difficulties and problems of school attendance and learning (Kimmel & Welmer, 1998). Zigler and Steveson (1993) reiterate that intervention programmes for school drop-outs should vary in their goals, methods, duration and age of the affected learners.

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The problem of school drop-outs is an international problem and South Africa is not spared, particularly its rural schools. Schools and communities have put in place some measures or strategies that are aimed at reducing learner absenteeism or total drop-out from school. It is the main objective of this study to examine the strategies which rural South African schools are using to curb the problem of learner drop-out from school. The study is, therefore, undertaken on the assumption that schools in South Africa have their own intervention strategies aimed at curbing the problem of school drop-outs.

Table 1.1 gives a brief summary of school dropout rates in the area in which this study was conducted. The table indicates that the drop-out figures at two selected schools grew from 21 to 51 between 2000 and 2004. This is an indication of the growing problem of learner drop-out in rural schools such as Tshilamba where this study was conducted.

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Table 1.1: Distribution of drop-out rates in Tshilamba circuit by school and year

School	Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
A	Enrolment	674	700	870	924	937	4105
	Drop-out	4	16	30	6	38	94
B	Enrolment	486	469	460	462	468	2345
	Drop-out	12	6	3	11	34	66

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Statistics shown in Table1.1 show that the number of learners who dropped out of school in 2000 was lower than the number of school drop outs in 2004. This means that there was an increase in school dropouts in 2004.

Table 1.2: Learner dropouts by year and gender in school A

Year	Males	Females	Total
2010	06	18	24
2011	08	12	20
2012	05	12	17
Total	19	42	61

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Table 1.2 indicates dropout rates of learners per gender in school A. The rate of learner dropouts here is indicated by year and gender. Learners who dropped out of school between 2010 and 2012 were 61 as compared to the 94 who dropped out between 2000 and 2004. It is evident that the number of learner drop outs in school A has increased in recent years.

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Table 1.3 Learner dropouts by year and gender in school B

Year	Males	Female	Total
2010	08	13	21
2011	14	17	31
2012	09	08	17
Total	31	38	69

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Table 1.3 shows both male and female learners in school B who dropped out school. The learner drop-outs related in this table indicated by year and gender. Learners who dropped out of school between 2010 and 2012 were 69 compared to the 66 who dropped out between 2000 to 2004. It is evident that the number of learner drop outs in school B has increased in recent years.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of school drop-outs is one of the major global socio-economic issues that have also negatively affected South African rural schools (NCES, 2001). This has led to a lot of social problems that include, among others, joblessness, unwanted children, delinquency, crime and violence. The rate of school drop outs is higher in South African rural schools than in urban schools (Schimmel, 2000). Most South African rural communities are generally poor due to a low level of education and inadequate skills which make it difficult for them to be employed.

It is further observed that many of the young mothers in South African rural communities are school drop-outs as a result of teenage pregnancy and many of them are unmarried, unemployed and depend on child grant funds (Runhare, 2010; Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod and Letsoalo, 2009). In most rural areas, there are no adequate recreational facilities or even community libraries where students may go and spend their time. These limitations can result in some rural students spending most of the time at bottle stores and bar-lounges as a way of whiling up time instead of concentrating on school related activities.

Since reasons for school drop outs vary, most schools and communities should develop ways and means of minimising the problem. The study is, therefore, meant to investigate the strategies that schools use to minimise the problem of drop-outs.

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1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has both general and specific study objectives that are listed hereunder:

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to identify the nature and examine the effectiveness of intervention strategies used to prevent learners in South African rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit of Vhembe District, Limpopo province from dropping out of school.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were stated as follows:

a) To identify the causes of learners dropping out of school at rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit.
b) To examine strategies used in schools to prevent learners from dropping out of school at South African rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit; and
c) To scrutinise and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies that high schools in Tshilamba circuit use to prevent learners from dropping out of school.

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1.4 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted on the assumptions that:

- There is a high rate of learner drop-outs in South African rural high schools.
- There are intervention strategies for trying to minimise school drop-out rates at South African rural high schools.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the study objectives, answers to the following questions were explored:

- What factors influence learners in rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit to drop out?
- How do high schools intervene to minimise the dropping out of learners at rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention strategies used by rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit to minimise learner drop outs?

1.6 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Creswell (2003) defines literature review as a summary of journals, articles and other documents that discuss related past and current research and knowledge on the topic under

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study. Bless (2000) adds that literature review is an integrated summary of available literature relevant to the research question. Bless' definition is supported by Kumar (2011) who states that a literature review is an integral part of the research process, which and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step made by the researcher through studying what is already done by other scholars on a topic.

According to Kumar (2011), the purpose of the review of existing literature is to:

- sharpen and deepen the theoretical framework of the research;
- familiarise the researcher with the latest developments in the area of research;
- identify gaps in knowledge, as well as weaknesses in previous studies; and
- study the advantages and disadvantages of the research methods used by others, in order to improve on them in one's own research.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Because this study investigated the push and pull factors to school attendance, participation and completion, it was informed by the principles and concepts of education as a fundamental children's right and children friendly school environment (UNICEF, 2008 and Subrahmanian, 2005). According to the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC, 1989). This theory arises from the view that education is one of the universally agreed basic rights that should be accessed by every child,. However, it is also universally agreed that unless education is made free and compulsory, the right to education for all could remain an unfulfilled wish, especially in poor and developing societies.

Related to the vision for making education accessible to every child is the concept of creating a child-friendly school and learning environment by all education stakeholders (UNICEF, 2008). It is on the basis of these theoretical views that this study seeks to investigate and examine how rural communities in South Africa put in place measures that help minimise the problem of school absenteeism or complete withdrawal from school so as to make education accessible to all children.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 School drop-out

Jaffe (1998) defines a school drop-out as a student who was previously enrolled but has not enrolled in the present year or has not graduated in the final year of schooling. Mcmillan,

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Marlyn, Kaufman, Philip and Whitener (1994) indicate that a broader meaning of drop-out includes those students who leave regular schools before graduation to enter correctional institutions, as well as those who enrol into other study programmes, or enter college but do not complete their study programmes. In this study a student drop-out is considered as a school drop-out. Schimel (2000) describes a school drop-out as an individual who is absent from school without an approved excuse or documented transfer and who does not return to school.

Gustavisson and Segal (1994) use the following three definitions to explain the concept of school drop-out:

- Drop-out is an annual measure of the proportions of students who quit school or irregularly attend school;
- The status drop-out rate measures the proportion of students who have not completed high school, or children of school going age who are not enrolled in any school; and
- The cohort drop-out rate reports the high school completion and drop-out rates for one group of students who are traced across a given period of time.

The importance of all these types of drop-out result in what is termed school drop-out in this study. The term "school drop-out", therefore refers to any means that can result in a learner losing out on schooling before completing grade twelve.

1.8.2 An Intervention is an orchestrated attempt by one or many people or an organisation to redress a problem. According to Sadker and Sadker (1991), some common preventive strategies for reducing school drop-out include counselling and provision of special services that make the school environment friendly to children. In this study, the term intervention refers to whatever schools are doing to minimise learners from dropping out of school or encourage learners to attend school.

1.8.3 Rural

In South Africa, human settlement can be categorised as either rural or urban. Rural settlements are areas that are characterised by farming, and these are areas where most of the black people live. Rural people are mostly poor compared to those in urban areas or towns. This study will only be conducted in rural schools.

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1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Before conducting any research study, it is important to plan and put in place strategies of how the data are to be gathered, processed, presented, interpreted and analysed. Without an appropriate research plan or methodology, the results of a study may be unreliable and invalid.

1.9.1 Research Design

The research design is a blue-print or detailed plan on how a research study is to be conducted from start to completion. The process of selecting a sample of interest to the study, collecting data to be used as a basis for testing hypothesis, and analysing results all constitute the research design (Thyer, 1993; Welman, Kruger and Mitchal, 2005; Bless, Smith and Kagee, 2009). Mouton (2009) defines a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem. According Mouton (2009), the main function of a research design is to enable the researcher to anticipate what the appropriate research decisions should be so as to maximise the validity of the eventual results. A research design is the set of procedures that guide the researcher in the process of verifying a particular hypothesis and excluding all other possible hypotheses or explanations to the problem under study. Bless (2009) also indicates that a research design allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the relationship between variables. Bless, Smith, and Kagee (2009) define a research design as a specific action of the most adequate operations to be performed, in order to test specific hypothesis under given conditions.

In this study, the research design, therefore, refers to the process, means and instruments that were employed to investigate how rural South African schools are addressing the problem of school drop-outs, and the effectiveness of the identified measures. This process includes identification of the appropriate research objectives, research questions, population and sample for the study, research instruments and methods of data gathering, presentation and analysis using a qualitative research design.

1.9.2 Research Methodology

Strauss & Corbin (1998) describes research methodology as a way of thinking about and studying social reality as well as a set of procedures and techniques for data gathering and analysis. According to Heinning, Van Rensburg and Smith (2010), methodology refers to the coherent group of methods that complement one another and that have the goodness to

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deliver data and findings that will answer the research question and suit the research purpose or objectives.

In order to generate an in-depth understanding and insight of the intervention measures used to minimise the number of school-drop-outs in rural high schools, this study used the qualitative method to collect and analyse data on the study topic (Drew, Hardman & Hart, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Babbie, 2010; Mouton, 2009).

1.9.3 Study Population

Babbie (2010) defines research population as a group (usually of people) from whom researchers want to draw conclusions. However, it is noted that researchers are almost never able to study all members of the population that are of interest to them. Mouton (2009) defines a research population as all inclusive elements of various kinds or the universe that different researchers choose to study. Another definition of population is given by Selttiz and Cook (1965 cited in Mouton 2009) who say that a population is the aggregate of all cases that conform to some designated set of specification, or a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristics that a researcher is interested in studying.

In this study, the target population compromised teachers, learners and community representatives in School Governing Boards (SGBs) in Tshilamba circuit area of Vhembe District, as well as teenagers who had dropped out of school. This population served as the universe from which a representative sample was drawn (Drew, Hardman and Hart, 1996; Macmillan and Schumacher, 2006). Tshilamba circuit was chosen as it is found in one of South Africa's rural areas and have secondary schools which are affected by high drop-out rates.

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1.9.4 Research Sample and sampling method

Sampling refers to procedures which involve the selection of elements from a target population (Mouton, 2009). The purpose of sampling is to define and identify from the population an appropriate number of subjects required for the study. Creswell (2003) defines a research sample as a part of the target population that the researcher plans to study, in order to generalise about that population. Similarly, Kumar (2011) is of the view that a sample is a sub-group of the population, which is the focus of one's research enquiry, and that is if selected in such a way that it represents the study population. Thus, a sample is composed of a few individuals from whom a researcher intends to collect the required information. The

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main aim of sampling in research is to produce a representative number of elements from the population of interest to the researcher (Mouton, 2009).

Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2003) was utilised because the study was conducted at two schools that are experiencing the problem of learner drop-out. Two schools were selected because they faced this problem. Teenagers of school-going age could be easily seen loitering in the villages around the two schools.

Besides purposive sampling, snowball sampling (Creswell, 2003; Mouton, 2009) was also used to locate teenagers of school going age for the study. Through snowballing, teenagers known researcher who had dropped out of school were identified by the researcher and asked to help identify others who had dropped out of school. The sample for this study comprised of 20 teachers from the two schools, 20 grade ten to twelve learners, 20 teenagers who had dropped out of school, and 10 members in the SGB committees.

1.9.5 Research instruments

A research instrument is anything that can be used to collect information, for example, observations, forms, interview schedules, questionnaires and interview guides (Kumar, 2005). In this study, qualitative data was collected using focus group interviews and documentation study as the two main research instruments.

1.9.6 Documentary study

A documentary study is a data collection method in which the researcher studies a collection of personal diaries, photos, video clips, minutes of meetings and other forms of records and documents (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). In this study, school documents on learner school attendance such as daily attendance registers, summary reports on school drop-outs and annual district and circuit reports on learner drop-out by gender and reason for dropping out were studied and analysed. These documents revealed the school drop-outs rates at the two schools where the study was conducted.

1.9.7 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews are a data gathering strategy used in qualitative research in which attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue such as a product, service provision or a programme are explored through a free and open discussion among members of a group and the researcher (Kumar, 2011). Focus group interviews are discussions of about 6 to 8 study participants in which the researcher raises issues or asks questions that stimulate a discussion

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amongst members of the group (Kumar, 2011). Kruger and Casey (2000) define a focus group as a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.

To conduct the focus group interview, an interview guide that acted as a checklist was utilised and probing questions were employed to find out the intervention strategies that are used by South African rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit area to minimise school drop-out rates.

Focus groups were utilised because of the following advantages: Interactions among participants enhance the quality of gathered data; and participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, and this weeds out false or extreme views, unlike in a series of one-on-one interviews (Patton, 2001). Compared to other methods of collecting data, the focus group interview is less expensive and needs less time to complete because views of many participants are gathered within one interview session (Kumar, 2011). Kumar also adds that it is a popular method for finding information in almost every professional area and academic field that a researcher might have interest in. Therefore, in this study, learners, school drop-outs, teachers and members of SGBs were interviewed in small manageable groups of up to 8 people. This will enable them to express their views on the nature and effects of intervention strategies used to reduce school drop-out rates in South African rural high schools.

1.9.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is the ability to break down one's data and to clarify the nature of the components parts and the relationship between them (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997). Whereas data interpretation "is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insight, it may offer possibilities, but no certainties as to the outcome of future events" (Bassey, 2000:44). Data analysis was conducted so that the researcher can detect consistent patterns within the data such as the consistent co-reliance of two or more variables (Bless, Smith, & Kagee, 2009).The process of data analysis allows the researcher to generalise the findings from the sample used in the research to the larger population in which the researcher is interested (Bless, Smith, and Kagee, 2009).

The documentary study generated data on the extent of the school drop-out rates at the two schools. Data was tabulated to show and compare the rate of school drop-outs in the two high schools in Tshilamba circuit. This tabulated data include age, grade, gender and reasons for

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leaving school. Data from focus group interviews was in the form of verbal or quoted statements, which was analysed using themes from statements made (Rubin, 1995).

1.10 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Delimitation is the limit of the problem area within which the researcher will work (Babbie, 2009:140). This study targeted all South African rural high schools, however, due to financial constraints and time, the study only covered two secondary schools in Tshilamba circuit. This sample is too small to represent the South African rural high schools. This study was limited to rural high schools in Tshilamba circuit area of Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. In particular, it focuses on learners who drop out of school, teachers, learners who are still at school, specifically the grade 10-12 learners and members of the SGBs in Tshilamba area. The rural high schools in the area were sampled for the study since the area is composed of very poor communities whose children dropped out of school before completing their schooling.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation pertains to the small number of adolescents who dropped out of schools. Since most of them are employed in brick yards and Indian shops they were not available during the time of the sampling. Another limitation is that boys who had dropped out were always drunk. This made it difficult to hold interviews with them. All this meant that data were obtained from a small sample.

A further limitation is that some teachers were reluctant to be tape recorded since they regarded research stressful and time consuming. However, the limitations did not stop the researcher from collecting data. Enough data was eventually collected.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek word "*ethis*" meaning one's character or disposition (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). In addition, it is related to the term "morality" derived from the Latin term "*moralis*" meaning one's manner or character. A moral issue is concerned with whether behaviour is right or wrong. Ethical issues in research are, therefore, concerned with whether the researcher's behaviour conforms to a code or a set of research principles (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). Kumar (2011) concurs with Bless, Smith and Kagee (2009) and states that ethics or ethical behaviour means being in accordance with principles of conduct that are considered correct, especially those of a given profession or

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help to stimulate further research on intervention strategies in other South African high schools, such as urban and farm schools.

The results of this study might also provide policy makers in government with useful information for use to re-examine the various implications of existing intervention strategies to reduce school drop-out rates in South African schools.

The findings of this study should help parents to understand the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children. It should enlighten SGB members on how to help the community to monitor children of school going age who might not be attending school. This will reduce problems such as unemployment, crime, poverty, prostitution and *gangsterism* which are common among poorly educated youths.

1.14 CONCLUSION

Preliminary literature study indicates that the problem of school drop-outs is prevalent all over the world. Therefore, it is important for all education stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and the Department of Education and community members to come up with workable intervention strategies to prevent this problem by analysing the usefulness of the strategies that schools employ to address the problem in rural South African schools. This study might add value to policy and practice in schools on how to minimise school drop-out rates.

1.15 CHAPTER DIVISIONS

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study:
Research aims, research methods, sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation of data, as well as the significance of the study were also outlined in this chapter. The rationale of the study and the definition of concepts related to the study topic were also discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature review:
This chapter covered much of what other researchers and authors have written on the study under investigation. The literature review ensures the alteration with major research instrument and research questions used.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology:
Research design and research methodology are covered in this chapter. Sampling used for the study is explained and justified, as well as the sample used.

Chapter 4: Data presentation and discussion:

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group. Making reference to research ethics, Williams, Tutty and Grinneli (1993:30) caution that, for researchers in social science, ethical issues are pervasive and complex since data should never be obtained at the expense of human beings.

The study of research ethics helps to prevent research biases and assists investigators in understanding their responsibilities as scholars (Bless, Smith, and Kagee, 2009). In addition, the goal of research ethics is to minimise any form of risks to study participants.

Bless, Smith and Kagee (2009) identify informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity as important ethical requirements that researchers must adhere to. Bearing these ethical requirements in mind, the following ethical measures were observed during data gathering at the selected schools:

- First, my research proposal was approved by the University of Venda Higher Degrees Committee(Appendix 1).
- I then sought permission from the Department of Education through the Circuit Manager and school principal to conduct the study at the selected schools.
- To protect participants' privacy, names not were requested from study participants.
- The personal rights and privacy of the participants were not infringed upon.
- Feelings of the participants were taken into consideration as all the questions were checked by the University Higher Degrees Committee before being administered to study participants.
- I ensured that there was no physical, psychological and mental harm to the participants by asking questions that did not seek information about their private or personal lives.
- Participants voluntarily participated in the study and had the right to withdraw their voluntary participation if they felt wished.

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1.13 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study should help all the stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGO), education planners, teachers, school principals and the Department of Education who seek to achieve quality education in South Africa. The study suggests ways of how to achieve high school completion rates.

The findings of the study will add to existing knowledge on intervention strategies to reduce high school drop-out rates in South African rural high schools and, hopefully, should also

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This chapter covered data presentation, analysis and interpretation. The results are also presented, discussed and interpreted in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, conclusions and recommendations:

This chapter discussed the findings. It also presents a summary of conclusions and makes recommendations for the study.

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CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature related to the study. The literature review focuses on the nature and causes of dropping out of school, and the intervention strategies used to prevent students from dropping out of school not only in South Africa but also globally.

According to Neuman (2003) and Kumar (2011), the literature review provides a framework of the research and identifies the area of knowledge a study is intended to expand and utilise in order to familiarise both the researcher and the readers with the latest developments in the area of research. In this regard, the literature study, for this study, established the latest developments and research on the broad topic of school absenteeism and complete withdrawal in order to identify knowledge gaps that this study filled through research findings.

2.2 THE PROBLEM AND PREVALENCE OF OUT OF SCHOOL LEARNERS

Although in modern days there are more children starting school than ever before, not all of them complete their schooling, especially secondary school and tertiary education levels. In many countries, especially in developing countries in Africa, the issue of school dropouts still poses a major challenge to school personnel (Shetzer, 1991). Research seem to indicate that, for many different reasons, due to school dropouts, the Millennium Development goals of achieving universal basic education and gender equality in education by 2015 may not be realised by 2015 by many African countries (NCES 2001;Runhare, 2010).

The reasons for withdrawals and school absenteeism vary from country to country. According to a study by Rumberger (1997), more than 50% of the drop-outs cited school related reasons for leaving school such as not liking school, being suspended or being expelled, while 20% of the dropouts citied economic reasons for dropping out. The next section of this chapter explores some of the major reasons why children drop out of school. This exploration was useful for this study which sought to investigate how some of the

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schools in South Africa are trying to redress or at least minimise the problem within their situation and circumstances.

2.3 PREVALENCE OF SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Dropping out of school is a worldwide problem. Even in developed societies like the US, the annual high school dropout rate is said to average 13, 3% in the whole country (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2001). The problem is actually bigger in developing countries like South Africa because of poverty. This means that the goal of achieving universal education by 2015 may not be achieved in developing nations. The issues and problems affecting education in the rural areas of South Africa are common in most rural areas particularly in less developed countries in Africa. Drop-out rates differ significantly between different countries due to the causes and nature of the country.

School drop-out problems also exist in developed countries such as Canada, Germany, France, Finland and the United Kingdom (Canadian Policy Research Network, 2005). According to the Canadian Policy Research Network (2005) between the year 2002-2004, countries with high school drop-out rates were the United States, Germany, France and Australia, while countries with less school drop-outs were Norway, Czech Republic, and Slovak Republic. Table 2.1 below gives a summary of the school drop-out rates in 14 different European countries.

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Table 2.1: High school drop-out rates by country, 2002 and 2004

Country	2002	2004
Norway	4, 6%	3,7%
Czech Republic	5,9%	6,4%
Poland	8,4%	6,5%
Slovak Republic	5,5%	6,6%
United kingdom	8,0%	7,3%
Finland	10,1%	9,1%
Sweden	8,6%	9,3%
Switzerland	8,4%	9,4%
Canada	10,9%	9,7%
Australia	9,9%	11,7%
United states	12,8%	12,6%
Germany	14,2%	13,1%
France	14,5%	14,6%
Australia	18,5%	16,9%

Source: Canadian Policy Research Network (2005)

In South Africa high school drop-out rates in rural schools is not a new issue, since the country has a history of students dropping out even before South Africa became a democratic country. According to Hartshorne (1993), of the 607 340 children who entered sub A in 1968, only 49,6% completed Standard 3 in 1972, and of the 515 449 children who were in sub A in 1965 only 31, 3% reached Standard 3. The final year of primary school in 1972 had only 22, 6% passing Standard 6 and qualifying to go to secondary school. Hartshorne (1993) also reported that the drop-out statistics in 1989 indicated that 174564 pupils in secondary schools dropped out during that year, and, of these, 9664 were in Standard 10.

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2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN DROPOUT STATISTICS

Since student wastages through students dropping out is a social or global problem, South Africa, like all other countries, is also affected by these problems of student wastages, more especially in rural high schools. In South Africa, by the year 2011, the total number of 478 959 youth between 16 and 18 were not at school (Govender, 2012:65). Furthermore, Govender (2012:5) also indicated that the reasons for these high drop-outs rates could also be linked to social issues such as poverty and children who are orphaned.

The South African 2011 statistics show the percentage and some of the reasons why South Africa youths are not attending school. Ten per cent of the children were not attending school because of illness, 9. 5% because they found education useless or not interesting, and 9% because they had no money for fees.

In South Africa, although dropout rates started to increase at secondary school levels and the dropout problem is prevalent in primary schools as well. (Trench; Van der Merve and Ndlangisa 2013) Trench, van der Merve and Ndlangisa argue that by 2011 a total number of 106830 children are in Kwazulu Natal between seven and fifteen were not attending school. Furthermore, the writers (2013) indicated that this province is regarded as the worst province because it has the highest number of dropouts 5, 75% amongst all the nine provinces of South Africa. Trench; Van Der Merve and Ndlangisa (2013) arranged the South Africa dropout statistics starting with the province with highest learner dropout rates. According to Trench; van der Merve and Ndlangisa (2013:13) the statistics for drop-out rates per province are as follows:

- The Northern Cape-with the country's smallest population , 9087 children or 4,25% of that age (7-15) group were not at school
- The western Cape -32 600 , or 4,12% of children in that age group were not at school
- The eastern cape-4 5621; or 3,68% of children in that age group; were not at school
- Gauteng -5 0705, or 3,41% of children in that age group ; were not at school
- The free state-13 614 ;or 3,68% of children In that age group , were not at school
- Mpumalanga -21 494; or 3, 03% of children in that age group were not at school
- Limpopo -18 939; or 18% of children in that age group were not at school

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According to Trench, Van der Merve and Ndlangisa (2013:13), the district with the highest rate of learner dropout is Kwasani with 20.96% or 1598 children who are not at school.

2.5 CAUSES OF DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

Research indicates that students drop out of school because of school related, economic-related, family-related, peer-related and personal reasons (Santrock, 1993; Cardoso and Verner, 2006; Kember, 1989). According to Santrock (1993), drop-outs have the following characteristics: had repeated grades or were average learners; were involved in pregnancy related problems, worked more than 20hours outside the school; had low reading test scores; had parents who had not finished high school; and had low self-concepts compared to students who had not dropped out of school. In addition, high school drop-outs had lower rates of homework completion, low educational expectations, and more had an externalised sense of self-control.

2.6 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO REDUCE SCHOOL DROP-OUT RATES

As the drop-out rates of learners are caused by various causes, identifying the causes for dropping out should be the first step in the identification of appropriate measures which can be used to curb school drop-out rates (Sadker & Sadker, 1991). The following are among the commonest preventive strategies for reducing school drop-out rates: counselling; the provision of special services to respond to personal and family challenges such as teenage pregnancy or parent-child conflicts; remedial and tutorial services to reduce academic obstacles; and the general creation of a safe and child-friendly school environment to fight school absenteeism and withdrawals (Sadker & Sadker, 1991).

The literature therefore, included issues such as the prevalence rates, the causes and interventions in different countries, including South Africa. This was used to compare and contrast with data collected for this study, in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of what South African rural schools are doing to curb the problem of school drop-outs in the country.

2.7 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH STUDENT DROP-OUT

Although it may not be possible to outline all the factors that influence learners to leave school, research has shown that poor relationships within the school, as well as in the home,

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levels of poverty, learner indiscipline, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy, premature marriages, and inadequate community and parental involvement in school matters are some of the identifiable problems that usually push students from school (Debra, 2008; Runhare, 2010). It is therefore important to discuss research which explains how these problems occur and have been dealt with in different societies, South Africa included.

2.7.1 Negative relationships between teachers and students

Classroom environments and situations should be ideally and typically warm and nurturing. This environment should help teachers get to know exactly which learners need help, in order to achieve their learning objectives and those who are at risk of dropping out of school for various reasons. Such information about the learners, according to McDavitt and Ormrod (2004), is supposed to include:

- The nature of academic and social abilities of students;
- Those who are physically challenged to the extent of compromising on their learning potential;
- Those who misbehave frequently in and outside class;
- Students who speak in dialects other than standard English;
- Members of ethnic minority groups in the school and recent immigrants; and
- Students who come from low income backgrounds.

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According to McDavitt and Ormrod (2004), the above mentioned are factors that usually contribute to the different perceptions of teachers to various learners that can further affect or attribute to different students. Sometimes, students who are not supported by their teachers or who have a poor relationship with their teacher and tend to dropout. A study done by Trusty, Dooley and Dickey (1993) revealed that when students reported a sense of alienation towards school, their grades in reading and mathematics were negatively impacted. In addition, when the class environment is perceived by students to be uninviting or non-supportive, students are likely to distance themselves either psychologically or physically from the environment (Eccles,Midgley, Wigfreid, Buckanan, Reuman & Flanagen, 1993).

According to Midgley, Anderman and Iticks (1995), schools have the ability to provide adolescents with opportunities to experience positive relationships while simultaneously developing the level of academic knowledge and understanding of their students. But in most

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South African rural schools, opportunities are not given to all the students since teachers are not prepared to improve these conditions (Midgley, Anderman and Iticks, 1995). In some cases, students are not treated with equal respect because some teachers have often been found to underestimate the ability of students who are physically unattractive or challenged and those from low income backgrounds (McDevitt, Ormorod & McDevitt, 2004). Such unequal perceptions and treatment of learners has been found to potentially limit the overall positive role school can play in the lives of students. This can contribute to a hostile school environment, and, therefore, withdrawals or loss of focus on learning (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfreid, Buckanan, Reuman & Flanagen, 1993).

Sometimes, the school environment itself and the poor social relationship between students and teachers also serves as a push factor that influences students' to drop-out. This is not only problem in South African schools, also a global one. When students negative experience in school are associated with limited availability of positive social relationship and lack of positive and caring environment they can choose to drop-out (Clabaughb & Rozycki, 1992). Garmezy (1991) also reported that students' perceptions of supportive relationships are protective factors in schooling and the wider community, which can help maintain high school enrolments and, therefore, can be a key strategy or factor in preventing school drop-out.

During the adolescent stage of child development, adolescents develop a sense of belonging, a need to belong somewhere and to be recognised, as well as to be accepted (Finn, 1989). Finn (1989) defines belonging as students' perception of there being mutually beneficial relationships in schools. According to Finn (1989), when a sense of belonging is absent, students are likely to have a higher rate of disruptive behaviour, and can drop out of school altogether.

2.7.2 Teenage pregnancy and early marriage

Research indicates that some of the main factors that contribute to the high risk of school drop-out for girls in developing countries like South Africa are school safety and teenage pregnancy (Grant & Hallman, 2006; Manzini, 2001). Among low income social groups of most developing societies, young women become pregnant before their 18th birthday, and about half of those pregnancies result in the birth of a baby, which negatively affects their education (Gale Zuiker, in Stenberg 1993).

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Early pregnancy among the unmarried high school girls is a major problem in most South African schools (Shetzer, 1991; Runhare, 2010; Tshehle, 2012). Furthermore, the pattern for many unmarried pregnant girls is tragic in that they are forced to quickly give up on their education. They are forced out of school or are unable to return to school after pregnancy (Shetzer, 1991). Many research studies in South Africa show that a high proportion of girls aged 16 and 17 drop out of school without completing grade 12 due to pregnancy, while those who may continue to study during pregnancy or as teen mothers face many challenges that result in no significant benefits from attending (Coclough, Rose & Thembon 2003; Runhare, 2010). Although South Africa has a policy that allows pregnant girls and teenage mothers to continue with schooling, research studies by Runhare (2010) and Runhare and Vandeyar (2012) revealed that teachers and other learners do not accommodate pregnant and former pregnant learners in schools. Even in the media, marriage, sexual abuse of girls and teenage pregnancy are frequently mentioned as reasons for pre-mature school leaving by girls in the country (National Research Council and Institute of medicine, 2005).

According to Grant and Hallman (2006), South Africa is unusual in the subcontinent in that it has a very high rate of premarital adolescent childbearing. According to the research, the high rate of premarital adolescent childbearing is influenced by liberal school policies, which allow pregnant girls and mothers to stay enrolled in school and the child grant fund support (Grant & Hallman, 2006). The study revealed that poor school progress, grade repetition and likelihood of leaving school are the main effects of school girl pregnancies.

Lack of knowledge on the use of contraception to prevent pregnancy and early involvement in sexual activities by young South African girls were the main causes of schoolgirl pregnancies in the country. Heys (1987) concurred with this and noted that at the time of the, intercourse about one third of all teenagers who do not use contraceptives fall pregnant because they do not know about contraception or did not think about it.

Steinberg (1993) stated that some students are motivated to indulge in sexual intercourse by television and magazines. They think that they (students) have to imitate what they have seen on television. In addition, non-marital and pre-marital sex is portrayed by young people as "romantic" existing such that pregnancy occurs to everyone as the outcome of their love

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making. Girls only think that it might happen to others or those who engage in sexual activities several times (Steinberg, 1993).

In South African rural areas, to talk about sexual intercourse to your child is regarded as a taboo. Stewart (1993) stated that adults seem to deny that adolescents are sexually active, and they deny them information about sex. Stewart (1993) also added that most parents do not mention intercourse or wet dreams to their children because of traditional views on sexuality issues among African societies. Such traditional views can contribute to lack of knowledge on the dangers of pre-mature sex and preventive measures on pregnancy. The result is pre-mature pregnancies, as well as pre-mature incompletion of schooling by school-going girls.

Apart from the loss of education, teenage pregnancy is considered a disaster for most people's future in general (Greathed, Devenish & Funnel, 2002). One key impact of early childbearing is that it is negative to the life of teen parents. Greathed, Devenish and Funnel (2002) stated that medical risks and long lasting emotional problems are some of the issues associated with teenage pregnancy. The girl learner also experiences isolation from her peers, while Greenberg, Bruises and Sands (1989) added that the girl's access to secondary and tertiary education will be limited in most cases. This is because, after birth, the new baby will need someone to look after and the teen parent has to face adult responsibilities and, at the same time, be a student (Greenberg, Bruises & Sands, 1989).

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Greathed, Devenish and Funnel (2002) also noted that emotions that are experienced as a result of the need to cope with teenage pregnancy are disappointment, anger, depression, feelings of being trapped, anxiety, insecurity and suicidal tendencies. Such emotional problems are known to impact negatively on the girls' will to continue with her education and, thus, many choose to drop-out.

2.7.3 Administration of corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is physical inflicting of pain on someone such as padding or spanking for disciplinary purposes (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 1990). Reeds and Bergerman (1993) defines corporal punishment as that physical contact such as striking, paddling or spanking of a student or inflicting pain to some body part. The purpose of corporal punishment is to maintain discipline among learners who are out of order or who behave in an unacceptable way. According to Clabaugh and Rozycki (1990), corporal punishment is usually

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administered when neglects one's school work and other serious forms of misbehaviour such as bullying, absconding from class or not respecting staff.

Although the South African School Act clearly prohibits corporal punishment in schools, there is evidence that teachers are still using corporal punishment in schools (Rossouw, 2002). In rural and township schools, the use of corporal punishment is applied more because of the belief that it is an effective means of maintaining school discipline. Excessive use of corporal punishment may be one reason for students dropping out of school (Rossouw, 2002). A survey by Education 2000 Plus Project found that at the 27 schools where the survey was conducted, teachers still resorted to the use corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure (Rossouw, 2002). Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that 81.5% of the learners, 74% of the teachers and 74% of the principals reported that corporal punishment was practiced in their schools. Thus, although corporal punishment has been outlawed both internationally and nationally, some teachers have not yet abandoned the practice and this can create a violent and unsafe school environment which could keep children away from school.

2.7.4 Ability grouping in public schools as a school drop-out factor

Chisaka (2002) stated that schemes for classification of learners and their unequal treatment are commonly used in school settings. Studies have revealed that most schools have a tendency of grouping learners according to their abilities. This means that slow learners or under-achievers are a grouped together and the intelligent ones are also separated from the others. These ability groupings have been found to be a disservice to many students because they are de-motivating factor to learning for those who are struggling with schooling (Chisaka, 2010). Although the assumption that low ability students will suffer damage of their self-esteem if mixed with higher achieving students has not been supported by research, many schools have resorted to ability grouping as a way of disciplining learners who could be disruptive in class (Oaks & Lipton, 1990; Chisaka, 2010). Therefore, those students with low abilities could feel excluded, disliked and drop out of school.

2.7.5 Suspension, expulsion and forced transfer

The aim of utilising suspension of students is to maintain discipline in schools (Clabaugh, & Rozyscki, 1990). Clabaugh and Rozyscki (1990) observed that students' suspensions and expulsions are common in most public schools. According to Clabaugh and Rozyscki (1990) a number of recent studies estimated that as many as 10% of all secondary school students are suspended at least during their schooling cycle.

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One aspect of school operations that has a clear and conscious relation to the dropout problem is the degree to which school personnel act to remove students from the school (Coockson, 1995). Many researches show that large numbers of students are expelled or suspended from the school (Children Defence Fund, 1974; Sizani, 2012). Even in the United States, a survey by the Washington Research Project found that suspensions and expulsions are common means of school discipline. According to Clabaug and Rozyscki (1990) apart from keeping students out of school and losing learning time, suspension also affects the future education of the students since when suspension or expulsion is listed on a student's record, college and university administrators offices frequently use such offences to deny enrolment.

2.7.6 Inadequate parental involvement in education

Swanson, Edwards and Spencer (2010) view parental involvement in schooling as an additional parenting variable that has been linked to the differing adolescents' school engagement and achievement. According to this view, parental involvement has a direct effects on the of child's learning as parents should play an integral part on how their children perceive education.

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According to Chuenyane (1991), the level of parental literacy impacts on their involvement in the schooling activities of their children. The study found that parents who are literate are more likely to be able to see the importance and value of education therefore they support and motivate their children in education. According to Levy (1971) Chuenyane (1991) a number of studies have found that commitment to education by parents can be a determinant to high dropout rates in families. In addition, the low adult literacy rate may be associated with variations in dropout rates as most literate parents do not involve themselves in the education of their children (Levy, 1971).

A study done by Nethengwe (2009) revealed that some parents in rural Mutale Municipal District in Great Vhembe, Limpopo Province, leave their families to work in urban areas. The study revealed that due to parental absenteeism, the education of the children is not monitored and, because of that, it suffered leading to poor school attendance and achievement in general (Nethengwe, 2009).

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In South Africa, there are children from broken families and those who come from families headed by children (Kapp, 1991). Kapp noted that some children come from broken homes, while others are openly rejected by their parents either partially or totally and, therefore, has to do without parental support. This results in lack of educational access for most of them due to lack of financial, material and psychological support. The home or family environment can, therefore, contribute to dropping out of school, especially in poor communities like those found in most rural areas in South Africa.

2.7.7 Unequal distribution of school resources

Tollman (2002) observed that there is usually unequal distribution of school resources and facilities in South African rural schools compared to urban schools. Most rural schools have small or no libraries, and some still lack electricity. Nethengwe (2009) also added that another contributing factor to drop-out rates in South African rural schools is the school atmosphere which is not conducive to learning because of poor classrooms which cannot accommodate learners. In rural and semi-urban areas, even after ten years of democracy, one still finds dilapidated 'permanent' temporary school structures built out of planks. These are unattractive, unhealthy and unsafe (Nethengwe, 2009).

Alexander (2008) also noted that the situation at most rural schools is not conducive to teaching and learning because pupils' schooling experiences consist of limited learning opportunities in overcrowded classrooms with insufficient learning materials. Added to this, children of different ages and abilities are put together in a single classroom without proper adaptation of teaching methods to improve learning of individual children (Alexander, 2008). In the worst rural schools, some learners have to sit on the floor while others use rubbish bins as chairs so that they do not get their uniforms dirty (Sizani, 2012; Alexander, 2008; Nethengwe, 2009). It could be argued that these poor and unhealthy physical conditions can often cause children to dislike school and end up dropping out of school.

2.7.8 Peer pressure factor

Santrock (1996) stated that during the adolescent stage, a sense of belonging tends to extend because adolescents need to belong somewhere and to conform to a particular peer group. According to Santrock (1996), the peer group is an important source of status and teach community in which social roles and standards related to work and achievement are formed. Failure by an adolescent to belong anywhere can cause loss of self-esteem or positive self-

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concept due to feelings of rejection. Such situations can cause learners to drop out of school if interventions are not employed by staff.

Coie, Dodge and Kupersmidt (1990) reported that there are two types of peers associated with dropping out of school, namely conventional peers and deviant peers. For instance many children with disruptive behaviours were found to experience peer rejection. This would lead to failure to get a group to belong to and to associate with. They may develop a sense of inferiority, shame and doubt and, as a result, may drop out of school (Coie, Dodge & Kupersmidt, 1990)). A study conducted by Oillenchikk, Borden and Green (1992) found that 9 year old rejected children failed more grades and were more likely to drop out of school more than rejected children. Association with drop-out friends during early adolescents may also contribute to students dropping out of school (Elliot & Voss, 1974).

2.7.9 Adolescent drugs and alcohol abuse

Another social issue that contributes to school dropouts is the abuse of drugs and alcohol by children, particularly by adolescents (Pugach, 2006). The problems of alcohol and drug abuse are a global issue since in each and every country all educational stake holders talk about it (Pugach, 2006). A report by Public Health Service (1974) reported that most adolescents begin drinking at homes where parents are excessive drinkers, while moderate drinkers or abstainers encourage like habits in their children. This statement is also supported by Broefin Brenner's (1992) developmental theory, which states that adolescents are always trying to find their identity and, as a result, they have adult role models whom they imitate. If these adults drink or abuse drugs, the adolescents, likewise, also drink and abuse drugs (Brofen, Brenner, 1992). In such cases, the schooling of the affected adolescents is threatened.

Stewart (1993) also stated that the main reason for some boys taking into drinking and drugs may be exaggerated masculinity and bravado. Most male adolescents indulge in drugs and alcohol abuse than girls. A study by Jones (1968) showed that boys who were overly dependent in junior high school, rebellious and were generally unable to maintain adequate relationships with others were more likely than their peers to drink excessively later on. Drugs and alcohol abuse have negative effects on the life and schooling of adolescents as observed by Reeds and Bergermann (2005) states that students who abuse drugs and alcohol are more likely to have academic, social and behavioural problems at school, and this could result in their expulsion.

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2.7.10 Grade repetition

Grade repetition in South African rural schools represents perhaps the most significant obstacle in producing learners who have gone through secondary education (De Bastors, 2005). De Bastors (2005) argues that there is a wide agreement that student repetition determines the opportunities of many children to get basic education. According to De Bastors (2005), high grade repetition is largely associated with high dropout rates due for the following reasons:

- High rates of repetition are frequently associated with rigid school systems not well adapted to young children;
- High repetition rates contribute to the problem of wide diversity which make a single teaching methods inappropriate;
- Repetition is associated with failure and discourages both students and their parents; and
- Failure to reach the goal or when a student repeats the same class several times, a sense of inferiority develops, which may force such a student to drop-out of school.

Hunt (2008), Sabates and Akyeampong, (2010) and Trench, Van der Merve and Ndlangisa (2013) argue that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out in future. This is usually preceded by excessive absenteeism and frequent school changes as most students who fail a grade usually change from one stream to another.

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The issue of grade retention as a factor that contributes to student drop-out rates inform South African rural schools was also supported by Baroo and Kolstrad (1987) who provided a report which revealed that grade retention increased the risk of dropping out of school by 30-50%. Sadker and Sadker (1991) also noted that between grades 5 to 8, the number of drop-outs soars to 40%, while the failure and grade retention rate drops to 35% in grade 11 and 12 not because of academic improvement, but because many students have dropped out of school and are no longer considered in the statistics.

Other researchers who supported the issue of grade retention are Gleanson and Dynarsic (2002) who noted that at high school level, low grades are moderately predictive of student dropout rates of around 27%. Kibel, Saloojee and Westwood (2010) note that in South Africa, the system of inclusive education also contributes to the high failure rate of drop-outs.

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The system of inclusive education includes all learners in the main stream schools (Kibel, Salooge & Westwood, 2010). It may be difficult for low ability children in a main stream schools since many teachers do not have skills required to educate these kinds of children. Therefore, without teachers who specialise in those particular learning problems or barriers of grade retention, dropouts would not be contained (Kibel, Salooge & Westwood, 2010).

2.7.11 Chronic sickness among children

Kibel and Wagstaff (cited in Landsberg, Kruger and Nel, 2010) define a chronic disease as one which disturbs a child's daily functioning for more than three months within protracted but stable or progressive and life threatening or a non-fatal handicapping condition. These are children with long term health conditions such as asthma, HIV/AIDS, congenital heart disease, childhood cancer, cerebral palsy, diabetes mellitus and haemophilia (Kibel, Salooge & Westwood, 2010). These diseases need special attention from both educators and parents. A long term condition is a condition that has a biological, psychological or cognitive basis, which results in the limitation of functions, activities, or social roles of the learners in comparison with his/her peers (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005), Kibel, Salooge and Westwood (2010). According to Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005) and Kibel, Salooge and Westwood (2010), chronically ill children spend most of their time in hospital and even at home, and when they come back to school, they find that other students have already covered large scope of school tasks. These experiences could lead to dropping out of school.

2.7.12 Family structure

The family situation may also contribute to high learners dropout rates. Debra (2008:53) illustrated two types of families that may contribute to students dropping out namely single parent families and divorced or remarried families. Children in these families are more likely to experience conflicts and lack of parental monitoring and discipline. This could lead to mental health difficulties; problem behaviours and school disengagement. All these activities can lead to learners dropping out of school (Debra, 2008:83). In single parent families, the parent may sometimes fail to buy new or brand name clothing for the children. Therefore, the failure to have new or brand name clothing, as well as a suitable place to stay; may influence adolescents to drop out of school.

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2.8 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL DROP-OUT

Kimmel and Welmer (1993) state that some intervention strategies are needed during the secondary school years to provide children with experiences which would stimulate their intellectual development and help them to succeed in school. Kimmel and Welmer (1995) also illustrate that all adjustment difficulties, problems of school absenteeism and attendance are treated with a wide variety of methods and approaches. Furthermore, Kimmel and Welmer (1995) argue that the choice of treatment depends mainly on the specific nature and source and how severe the problem has become. Since the causes of students dropping out of school differ from school to school, the strategies to be applied should also be different.

Likewise, Zigler and Stevenson (1993) argue that intervention programmes for student drop-outsdiffer. Programmes vary in their goals, methods of intervention, education of services and age of participants. Sadker and Sadker (1991) are of the view that early intervention is an important first step, so that students at risk of dropping out can be targeted for special services, in order to develop more effective learning skills and regular attendance patterns. In addition, identifying the causes for dropping out can lead to several positive developments (Sadker & Sadker, 1991).

Reed and Bergermann (1995) note that in South Africa, many schools are developing programmes with the specific aim of preventing students from dropping out of school. According to Reeds and Bergermann (1995), these programmes are different, but all of them attempt to make schools more hospitable places for students to learn effectively. Reed and Bergermann (1995) also state that in different countries, various measures are applied, in order to prevent students dropping out from both primary and secondary school. These measures include punishing students for poor attendance, counselling and home visitations by teachers in order to talk to both parents and students. The following section reviews and discusses some of the most common methods used by schools to prevent students dropping out from school.

2.8.1 Positive teacher-student relationships

Dropout prevention starts with the caring of teachers who give students every chance of success in the classroom through interactive and experimental teaching methodologies. Students prefer caring teachers who are able to encourage student success and engagement.While adolescents have a strong attachment and belief in their parents, it must be understood that they also have a strong belief in their teachers. Eccles, Midgley and Wigfreid

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(1993) argue that, adolescents believe that their academic abilities are influenced by both their parents and teachers' beliefs. Swanson, Edwards and Spencer (2010) state that teacher efficiency has a significant association with student achievement and engagement at school, while the opposite is true where teacher efficiency is low (Swanson, Edwards and Spencer (2010).

Midgley and Urdan (1996) show that supportive or positive relations with teachers are associated with students' feelings of school belonging and students' grade achievement. Therefore many researchers encourage positive relationships between teachers and learners since these influence students' grades (Swanson, Edwards & Spencer 2010; Myers & Myers 1990)

Myers and Myers (1990) argue that good teachers cultivate positive relationships with students. These relationships are complex professional associations between teachers as superiors and learners as their subordinates. Thus, in schools where there is a positive relationship between teachers and students, the dropout rates are lower than in schools where there is a negative relationship between teachers and students (Myers & Myers, 1990; Swanson & Edwards, 2010). Midgley and Urdan (1996) also agree that supportive and positive relations between teachers and learners were positively linked to student feelings of belonging to the school.

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Another argument on school retention is that, whatever personality type the student indicates in class, teachers should remain as substitutes for parents, managers of behaviour, confidence advisors, arbitrators and role models (Myer & Myer 1990; Hunt 2008). Students need to be accepted and to experience a warm and caring atmosphere, which is conducive to learning. When problems emerge, attempt should be made to work with students to find solutions cooperatively before students feel rejected and decide to abscond or leave school.

2.8.2 Teenage pregnancy Prevention programmes

Schoolgirl pregnancy is one major cause of the access and retention gap between boys and girls in most countries in the developing world, South Africa included (Chigona & Chetty 2008; Runhare, 2010; Runhare & Vandeyar, 2011; Grant & Hallman, 2006). To combat the problem of the girl child dropping out due to teenage pregnancy, research indicates that the most effective way to prevent teenage pregnancy and child parenthood is to reduce the

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number of adolescents who have sexual intercourse. This is because the main cause of teenage pregnancy is youth engagement in sexual intercourse (Steinberg, 1993; Runhare, 2010; Runhare & Vanderyar, 2011).

One strategy that can be used to prevent the issue of teenage pregnancy is for parents to the traditional notion which prohibits them from talking about sexual issues with their children (Steinberg, 1993). According to Steinberg (1993) and Steinberg (1983), more teenage pregnancies seem to occur where parents do not discuss intercourse, contraception, abortion or wet dreams with their children. Sadker and Sadker (1991) also suggest that teaching students the moral of saying no to sex before marriage protects the youth from becoming pregnant.

Sadker and Sadker (1993) noted that sex education is one strategy that prevents teenage pregnancy. In addition, Sadker and Sadker reported that schools should offer different sex education programmes which are designed to respond to different community interest groups such as traditional or conservative communities, as well as those from the more permissive communities.

Girls may fall pregnant while at school. Steinberg (1993) state that teen parenthood programmes have been done, in order to solve the problem of teen parents dropping out of school. According to Steinberg (1993) teens with children usually need training in parenting skills and programmes to help them to remain in school so that they can finish their high school or University studies and educational and career goals. Programmes on teen parenthood should be available in schools in order to teach teenage mothers how to handle their new born babies, teach them how to improve their academic achievements (Steinberg, 1993). Parents should provide physical emotional and economic support for their teenage parents so that they can remain in school (Stewart, 1993). However, research in South Africa indicates that teachers, other learners and parents do not give adequate support to girls who may fall pregnant while at school as well as teenage mothers (Chigona & Chetty, 2008; 2008; Runhare, 2010; Runhare and Vandeyar, 2011, 2012; Grant and Hallman, 2006). This contributes to the high school dropout rates of girls.

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2.8.3 School-based child care centres

After child birth, some students fail to find someone to look after their babies since most teen parents come from child-headed families. Therefore, provision of school based child care centres where students can send their newborns and remain at school after birth is necessary (Steinberg, 1993). In addition, the expansion of state subsidised child care for young mothers who are in school has been found to be useful in keeping girls in school (Steinberg, 1993).

2.8.4 Parental involvement in education

Swanson, Edwards and Spencer (2010) define parental involvement in schooling as an additional parenting variable that is being linked to adolescents' school engagement and achievement. Unfortunately, many parents are still not aware about their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children. Both Steinberg (1993) and Stewart (1983) also argue that parent involvement in the education of their children requires that parents who are educated to make real decisions. This would empower them to know where, what and how their children should learn.

Entwisle and Hayduck (cited in Steinberg, 1993) reported that parents who encourage school success and set higher standards for their children's performance and homework completion, are likely to be more involved in their children's education by helping in course selection and all aspects of learning that contribute to students success. Pugah (2006) observes that in situations where parents distance themselves from the education of their children, the children tend to drop out from school. Another study done by Taylor, Seaton and Domguez (2008) revealed that both direct assistance and involvement by parents through interaction within schools were associated with school achievement and engagement. Other researchers such as Bryk and Thum (1989), McNeal (1999) and Rumberger (2001) believe that parents provide the encouragement and stability that is vital to their children success and continued stay in school.

2.8.5 A safe and caring school climate

Boyd (1992) defines a safe and caring school climate as a shared perception of the school which promotes an effective and meaningful situation or a classroom climate that is conducive to learning. Where the school environment is supportive and conducive to learning, students complete their education. According to Walker&Greene (2009), Croninger and Lee (2001) caring teachers are an important source of social capital for students, and this

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which can help to reduce the probability of learners dropping out of school. Schools in which teachers are supportive and firm maintain a high, well-defined standard of behaviour and academic work. They have fewer problems and high rates of attendance, lower rates of delinquency and higher scores on tests and achievements (Steinberg, 1993).

In addition, student progress should be monitored regularly, in order to identify those students who are at risk as early as possible so that necessary strategies can be applied to prevent student drop-out (Pugach, 2006). Safe schools continually assess progress by identifying problems and collecting information regarding progress toward solutions. In schools where student progress is not monitored, students may lose interest and focus on their education.

2.8.6 Drugs and alcohol abuse prevention strategies

Drugs and alcohol abuse is a social issue which, together with other social problems, contributes to school dropout rates (Johnston, O'Malley, Benchman and Schulenberg, 2004). According to Johnson, O'Malley, Benchman and Schulenberg (2004), nearly 22% of high school learners in South Africa use drugs, of which 40% are in grade 12.

Students at risk of abusing drugs and alcohol and those who already engage in such activities should be targeted for special services in order to develop more positive school attitudes, more effective learning strategies (skills) and good attendance patterns (Johnson O'Malley, Benchman & Schulenberg, 2004). There is variety of strategies that schools can use to help South African students to live a life without using drugs and alcohol. These could include drug and alcohol abuse awareness campaigns, community-based prevention programmes and chemical awareness responsibility education. The government should also revisit the act of selling drugs at taverns, shebeens and bottle stores. Shebeens and bottle stores should not allowed be situated around or near schools, colleges and universities so as to prevent learners from getting opportunities to buy or use drugs and alcohol (Steinberg, 1993).

2.8.7 Affective education

Adolescents use drugs and alcohol for their own reasons. According to Ray and Kiser (1996), young people might use drugs so as to produce certain feelings of excitement. Therefore, it is the task of the teacher to help those adolescents to understand their own feelings and how to

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express them positively. It is also important to help children achieve emotional control without using drugs and to teach them to feel valued and accepted.

Ray and Kisir (1996) further indicate that another way to help learners to reduce their usage of drugs and alcohol so that they can continue with their studies is to use the values clarification. This is a strategy aimed at teaching students to freely recognise and express their own feelings and beliefs.

Ray and Kisir (1996) also state that students should be taught how to cope with stressful situations and feelings. Students should be taught personal and social skills that will help them to cope with school and classroom situations. Several studies have indicated that adolescents who smoke, drink or use marijuana also get lower grades and are less involved in organised sports or school clubs (Ray & Kisir, 1996). Pugach (2006) noted that another programme which can be used to fight the use of drugs and alcohol is a drug abuse resistance education (DARE). According to Pugach (2006) DARE programs undertook a significant communication between students and police officers who facilitated and emphasised the risks of drugs and the need to make good life by using drugs and to make good life decision.

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2.8.8 Child-friendly learning environment

The school environment, itself, can determine the students' engagement and disengagement at school (Lee & Burkam, 2003). A school environment with caring teachers, who treat all students with respect and care, influences learner success and engagement at school.

Steinberg (1993) noted that, in good schools, the classroom environment encourages dialogue between teachers and students, and among students. Good and safe schools are identified in terms of their child-friendly policies, secure structures, interaction between teachers and learners, parental involvement. They also include learners from different and courage backgrounds, equal and fair treatment of all learners (UNICEF, 2008). In such a school, learners, teachers and parents are free to participate in decision-making processes on such issues as policies and how they are to be implemented. When learners feel that they are valued, they develop a sense of self-respect and belonging, which keeps them going on in school.

2.8.9 Flexible educational options that support all youth

Kapp (1991) stated that some children have to work after school and during the weekends to supplement the family's income and, therefore, have little time for school work. Some

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students have to take care of their parents and their loved ones who might be sick, especially in these days of HIV and AIDS. According to the Task Force Report (2010), young people who dropped out of high school often face complex life circumstances which may require them to work to support their house hold.

Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) added that many children particularly those in rural agricultural areas, have pressures to work, and this which often clashes with traditional school time tables. In some cases during peak harvest periods, students will leave school and go there for temporal employment.

Flexible schooling timetables have been known to accommodate students with these problems thus, cutting drop-out rates in areas where outside social and economic factors pose a serious threat to consistent attendance (Sebates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt 2010). To accommodate those children who do not have enough opportunities to attend school during the day, an option that allows students to attend school in the evening was suggested by the Task Force Report (2010). In addition evening schools can help some students to balance work and school life.

2.8.10 School capitation grant and feeding scheme

Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) define capitation as a policy provides direct funding based on enrolment to all public basic schools. The school feeding scheme is a small part of the integrated food programme, a strategy for South African schools introduced in 2002. It involves the departments of Health, Social Development, Land Affairs, and Agriculture.

According to Ministry of Education,Science and Sports (MOESS) (2007), the capitation grant scheme was introduced in 2005. By the year 2005, enrolment across primary to junior high school increased by about 17% (MOESS, 2007). Since poverty is regarded as the main cause of students dropping out from South African rural schools, the provision of school feeding and capitation grant schemes served to remove the burden from parents of enrolling their children in school. This also encouraged many children including those who had previously dropped out because of fees to enrol (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt, 2010).

According to Gustavission and Segal (1994) school meal programmes are vital to the well-being of children from poor backgrounds to prepare them better for schooling. MOESS (cited

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in Sabates and Akyeampong; Westbrook and Hunt, 2010) reported that, in those areas where school feeding was been introduced, there is evidence that drop-out rates gone down. According to Sabates, Akyeampong; Westbrook and Hunt (2010), school feeding programmes that aim to provide nutritious meals to children are likely to have the double benefit of improving attendance and the general well-being of children. Studies confirm that a hungry child cannot learn effectively and also that hungry learner will be distracted and more likely to experience discipline and health problems (Buxton, 2010).

2.8.11 Abolition of corporal punishment

Before democratic South Africa, corporal punishment was used, in order to maintain discipline at schools such as poor work and misbehaviour (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 1992). It is, however, argued that the effectiveness of physical or corporal punishment in schools is limited because corporal punishment may temporarily suppress the misbehaviour instead of moving it completely (Gastavisson & Segal, 1992; National Association of Elementary school Principal [NAESP], 1994).

Since research indicates that corporal punishment may adversely affect a student's self-image and school achievement, and may contribute to disruptive and violent student behaviour, the NAESP suggested that the practice of corporal punishment in schools should be abolished (NAESP, 1994). From 1994 many Acts that outlaw corporal punishment were passed (Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe, 2011). The banning of corporal punishment in schools was done under Section 10 of the South African Schools Act Number 84 of 1996,which stipulates that no person may administer corporal punishment to a learner who is being sanctioned (Ngidi, 2007).

Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2011) also noted that in South African schools, corporal punishment must not be used at all, and that those who use it in contravention of the laws of the country, may be prosecuted in a court of law. The removal of corporal punishment may be one of the measures the government of South Africa adopted to prevent fear and abuse of children in schools. This is in line with the Child Rights Convention which South Africa is signatory to (Runhare, 2010).

2.8.12 Remedial education

Gains and Nicholas cited in Van Wyk (1988:9) define remedial education as "that part of education which is concerned with the prevention, investigation and treatment of learning

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difficulties from whatever source they may emanate and which hinder the normal educational development of students". According to Kapp (1991:53), remedial teaching is an "aid which is offered in a teaching context to certain children in whom specific learning problems have been identified". It is such children with learning difficulties who end up losing hope in schooling and dropout if they are not given remedial attention. Schools with viable remedial programmes are, therefore, more likely to minimise the chances of learner dropout.

Students are interested in a supportive atmosphere, which is conducive to learning. Therefore, Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) are of the view that students should be supported to circumvent barriers to achieving their learning potential. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) the aim of remedial specialist is, generally, to rectify the learners' short-comings or failings and to accelerate the learners' development or to address specific problems or weaknesses in the learner. Students, who are struggling, academically, need intensive remedial instruction in small classes that permit a warm and caring atmosphere, in order to overcome the negative psychological effects of school failure (Berk, 1996). Good academic remediation, good academic assistance must be combined with social support and special counselling so that struggling students do not contemplate absconding or leaving school.

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2.8.13 Student and peer level interventions

Some learners drop out of school due to peer pressure or influence from friends. Therefore, it is important to identify those students who are at risk of dropping out of school and intervene either as a group or individuals (Dupper1993 cited in Debra 2008:56).

After identifying these students, they should be protected and encouraged not to drop out of school (Debra 2008:86). According to Debra (2008:56), the following strategies can be used to reduce the rate of learner dropout in the South African rural high schools:

- Building academic skills;
- Developing and maintaining positive attitudes;
- Building learners' positive self-esteem;
- Encouraging positive attachment to the school; and
- Increasing school attendance and performance.

Despite all these strategies, the problem of learner drop-out has not been completely eradicated, especially in developing and low income communities such as those found in South Africa.

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2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Since this study sought to investigate remedies to school drop-out, this chapter discussed available literature and research studies on the causes of dropping out of school and some of the possible remedies that schools can use to minimise the drop-out rate. Existing literature indicates that the major reasons for learner drop-out are found within the school environment, and that workable strategies can also be developed within the school. The next chapter presents and discusses the research methodology that was employed to gather data from the selected sources.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to examine the intervention strategies to reduce the number of student's drop-out from South African rural high schools. In the last chapter, literature and related studies on the topic were presented and discussed. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology which were employed to gather and organise the data for the study, whose major objective was to investigate the nature and effectiveness of the intervention measures which rural high schools in South Africa use to minimise the rate of learner drop-outs. Specifically, the chapter discusses the broad research design and methodology, population and sample of the study, sampling method, research instruments, the data gathering process, quality control for the study and ethical considerations used to ensure validity and reliability of the methodology.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In conducting any research study, it is important to plan and put in place strategies of how data for the study is to be collected, processed, interpreted and analysed. Without an appropriate approach for the research process, a study may be unreliable and invalid (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

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3.2.1 Research design

Research design is defined as a blue print or detailed plan on how a research study is to be conducted from start to completion. This includes the process of selecting a sample of interest to study, collecting data to be used as a basis for testing the hypothesis or research questions and assumptions, presenting and analysing data into results or findings of the study (Thyer, 1993, Welman, Kruger & Mitchal, 2005; Bless, Smith & Kaggee, 2009; Mouton, 2009). Mouton (2009) defines a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing a research problem. According to Mouton (2009), the main function of a research design is to enable the researcher to anticipate what the appropriate research decision should be so as to maximise the validity of the eventual results. A research design is, therefore, a full set of procedures that guide the researcher in the process of verifying a particular hypothesis or explanation to the problem under study. Bless (2009) also indicates that a research design allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the relationship

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between variables that are of importance to the research objectives. It is, furthermore, stated added that a research design is a specific action which includes the most adequate operations to be performed, in order to test specific hypothesis under given conditions (Bless, 2009).

For this study, the research design refers to the whole process, the selected study sites and sample of participants, means and instruments that were employed to investigate how rural South African schools are addressing the problem of student drop-outs and the effectiveness of the identified school-based interventions to learner drop-out. This also includes how the gathered data were presented and analysed to come up with the conclusions and recommendations that of the study.

3.2.2 Research methodology

Strauss and Robins (1992) describe research methodology as a way of thinking about and studying social reality and a set of procedures and techniques for data gathering and analysis, while to Heinning,van Rensberg and Smit (2005) methodology refers to as the coherent group of methods that complement one another and that have the goodness to deliver data and findings that will answer research questions and suit the research purpose and objectives. Babbie (2010) indicates that, it is important to be aware that every method has its strength and weaknesses.

Since my study focuses on exploratory questions, I found the qualitative method to be most appropriate to gather and analyse the views of teachers, learners and members of the school governing body on how they try to redress the problem of learner drop-out at their schools. The data on the numbers of drop-outs by grade, age, gender and year are tabulated in the first section of chapter four.

Therefore, although the quantitative methods of data gathering and analysis were not applied, the study, however, generated some quantifiable data as a means of complementing qualitative data (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006; and Babbie, 2010). In this regard, Babbie (2010) further advises that it is better to have a research design that uses more than one research method, in order to take advantage of the strength to generate fruitful knowledge.

The study was more qualitative as it was aimed at finding out how participants explained the strength and weaknesses of the strategies that can be used to curb school drop-outs in South African rural high schools. Hence, the researcher used individual and focus group interviews, and school records as the main data gathering instruments.

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3.2.3 Study population

Babbie (2010) defines a study population as that aggregation of elements from which the sample is actually selected, while a research population is a group (usually people) from whom researchers want to draw conclusions. Mouton (2009) defines a research population as all inclusive elements of various kinds or the universe that different researchers choose to study. Another definition of population was given by Selttiz and Cook (cited in Mouton, 2009:134) who say that "a population is the aggregate of all cases that conform to some designated set of specifications or collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristics that a researcher is interested in studying". Bless, Smith and Kagee (2009) concurs that a research population is an entire set of objects or people who a researcher wants to determine some characteristics.

It is, however, noted that researchers are not able to study all members of the population that are of interest to them (Babbie, 2010; Mouton, 2009). For example, in this study, due to several reasons, it was not possible to include all schools in Tshilamba circuit and, therefore, a small number of participants with similar characteristics were selected to represent the population (Babbie, 2010).

In this study, the target population were teachers, Heads of Department (HOD's), teachers, learners and community representatives in school governing boards (SGBs) and children of school-going age that had dropped out of school in school in Tshilamba circuit, Vhembe District. This population served as the universe from which a representative sample was drawn (Drew, Hardman & Hart, 1996; MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). However, it was not possible to include all different categories of the targeted population due to time and resource constraints. For example, principals in two schools were too busy with their daily school duties to participate in interviews, so only teachers were interviewed.

3.2.4 Research sample and sampling method

Sampling refers to procedures which involve the selection of elements from a target population, whereas a research sample is a subset of participants drawn from the population to represent the whole population (Creswell, 2003; Mouton, 2009; Babbie, 2010). A sample is, therefore, a part from the target population that the researcher plans to study, in order to generalise about that population. Kumar (2011) adds that a research sample is a sub-group of the population, which is the focus of a research enquiry, and is selected in such a way that it

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represents the study population. In this study, a sample is the number of teachers, and learners, members of the SGBs and children who dropped out of school before completion of the grade 12 studies. This sample was selected from the study population to represent the large group.

The purpose of sampling is to identify and to define from the population, an appropriate number required for the study. The main aim of sampling, in this study, was to produce a representative number of elements from which the population of interest to the researcher could be studied (Mouton, 2009). Bless, Smith and Kagee (2009) indicate that the major aim in sampling is to determine the study participants that best represent a population so as to allow for an accurate generalisation of results. These can be achieved by the use of complex and relevant sampling frameworks or methods (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009).

In this study, sampling was done to save time and other resources since the research was conducted within a prescribed period of time for the Master of Education degree programme. Purposive sampling was utilised so as to reach within a reasonably short period of time the appropriate elements with required information on the topic. According to Babbie (2010), purposive or judgemental sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method in which units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones will be most useful or representative according to the knowledge they possess on the issues under study.

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The study was conducted at two secondary schools in Tshilamba circuit which were affected by a high rate of drop-outs. It was also easy for the researcher to reach the two schools that were sampled. Another reason for the use of purposive or judgemental sampling is that the researcher is a community member in Tshilamba and that she is also aware of youth in this community who have dropped out school. Besides purposive sampling, opportunistic sampling was also used to select the study sites that could be easily accessed by the researcher. (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009; Mouton, 2009).

Teachers were included in the study because they have experience in working with learners who are at risk of dropping out of school, and they have knowledge of some of the strategies that can be used to reduce the number of students who drop out of school. Parents in SGBs were selected because they are community representatives who are able to identify reasons

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why children drop out of school. In addition SGB members also participate in school policy formation on strategies which can be used to curb school drop-outs in their communities.

Learners who were at school at the time the study was conducted were included because they had seen their classmates dropping of school and they are also affected by measures taken by school management to minimise the problem of learner drop-out. Children who had dropped out were sampled because they could give information about the causes of dropping out of school, and they had experienced the impact of being school drop-outs in the community. Lastly Tshilamba circuit was selected because it is found in South Africa's rural areas and because it has secondary schools which are affected by a high school drop-out rate.

Altogether, 70 participants were purposively selected from the two secondary schools and communities around Tshilamba circuit area. The sample comprised of 10 community representatives in the school governing boards (SGBs) at the two schools, 20 teachers, 20 Grade 10-12 learners who were at school and 20 teenagers who had dropped out of school for different reasons. The participants were all drawn from two rural schools in Tshilamba circuit.

As a member and teacher in the community where the study was conducted, I had access to teenagers who had dropped out of school through social networks such as their places of employment places, and places of entertainment and recreation. My selection focused on those who knew me or those I had taught before they dropped out of school. It was because of their knowledge and history of the researcher, as well as the explanation given to them about the purpose of the research that the former students had confidence to participate in the study.

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND DATA GATHERING PROCESS

Research instruments are anything that can be used as a means of collecting information from the selected research sources. These include observation forms, interview schedules, documents and questionnaires (Kumar, 2005; Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). In this study, qualitative data collection instruments, in the form of documentary study, individual face to face and focus group interviews were employed to gather data on the extent of the learner drop-out rate and intervention strategies that schools employed to reduce the drop-out rate at their school records and sampled study participants. The next section presents and discusses the process of data gathering using the selected research instruments.

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3.3.1 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is a qualitative data gathering strategy in which opinions and attitudes towards an issue such as the quality of a product, service provision or programme are explored through a free and open discussion among the few members of the sampled group and the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Leedy, 2005; Bless *et al.*, 2009; Kumar, 2011). A focus group interview or discussion should comprise about 6 to 8 study participants to whom the researcher raises issues or asks questions that stimulate a discussion amongst members of the group (Daymond & Holloway, 2002; Kumar, 2011). Kruger and Caseyl (2000) define a focus group as a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions in a permissive and non-threatening environment. Marshall and Rosman (2006) add that participants in a focus group discussion are people who have been selected because they share certain characteristics, which are relevant to the topic to be discussed.

In this study, focus group discussions were used to get the views of the teachers, parents in SGBs, children who dropped out of school and grade 10 to 12 learners. The discussion sought to establish the intervention strategies that are used at their schools to prevent the number of learners who drop out of school. All these selected groups of participants were found relevant because their schools had experienced learner dropout and, therefore, it was assumed that they had relevant information on the topic under study. The advantage of focus group interviews was that I physically interacted with the respondents involved in this study and managed to clarify questions and concepts to ensure that no one struggled with answering questions. My presence enabled me to also study their body language and attitudes.

3.3.2 Documentary study

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), documentary analysis is a data collection method in which issues are investigated through a review of collections like personal diaries, photos, video clips, minutes of meetings and other forms of organisational records. Although this study was largely conducted to identify and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention strategies to learners dropping out at two South African rural schools, statistical data on the rate of school drop-outs in Vhembe district, Tshilamba circuit and at the two schools were also deemed important to study. In order to achieve this, enrolment summary records at district, circuit and school level were analysed. Records such as school registers and summaries that schools produce at the end of the term and year were studied (see Appendix 5).

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3.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Saundaries, Lewis and Thornhill (1997:388) define data analysis as "the ability to break down your data and clarify the nature of the component parts and the relationship between them". Data interpretation is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and theoretical insights (Bassey, 2000).

The process of data analysis allows the researcher to generalise the findings from the sample used in research to larger population in which the researcher is interested (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). Data from focus group interviews were presented verbatim and analysed using themes from statements made by the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Due to the qualitative nature of the data gathering instruments and procedures, this study largely generated qualitative data in the form of verbatim narratives from focus group interviews that explored the various means and factors that influence learner drop-out from rural South African schools, and how schools tried to reduce the problems.

This means the actual statements made by the participants were either paraphrased or directly quoted to illustrate the similar common and different views on the topic. Similar views were summarised into themes while the different views were used to illustrate those participants who disagreed with the common trends. Content analysis and the interpretation of gathered data was applied by, first, manually arranging the participants' views into themes and categories and then filtering them down into findings of the study (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009; Babbie, 2010).

However, before the presentation of qualitative data gathered through focus group interviews, quantifiable data in the form of the number of dropouts in Vhembe District, Tshilamba circuit and at the two schools where the study was conducted were presented in tables. This data were important to indicate the rate of school drop-out by year, grade and gender between 2010 and 2012. The Greathed, Devenish and Funnell (2002) data were then explored through focus group interviews as the different study participants explained the causes and interventions to learner drop-out in the schools.

3.5 QUALITY CONTROL AND ETHICAL MEASURES

The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek word 'ethics' which means one's character or disposition (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). The concept of ethics is related to morality which is derived from the Latin word 'morals' which also means one's manners or character and

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right or wrong behaviour (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009). According to Bless, Smith and Kagee (2009), ethical issues in research are therefore concerned with whether the researcher's behaviour conforms to the set of codes for research principles. This is supported by Kumar (2005:210) who says ethical behaviour "means being in accordance with principles of conduct that is considered correct especially those of a given profession or group".

Making reference to research ethics, Williams Tutty and Grinneli (1993:30) caution that, for a researcher in social sciences, ethical issues are pervasive and complex since data should never be obtained at the expense of human beings. Consideration of research ethics helps to prevent biases, and assists investigators to understand their responsibilities so as to avoid putting the subjects or participants of a research study at risk (Bless, Smith & Kagee, 2009).

Most scholars on research ethics identify informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity as important ethical requirements that researchers must adhere to (Bless, Smith and Kagee, 2009). Participation in research should be voluntary, and the participation should not endanger the health, psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing of anyone (Bless, Smith and Kagee, 2009). Bearing in mind these ethical requirements, the following measures were taken to protect all the participants who took part in the focus group interviews:

- Before conducting the study, as per university requirement and procedure, the research proposal was first approved by the University Higher Degrees Committee (see Appendix 1). Permission was then obtained from the district and circuit managers and school principals to conduct the study at the selected schools (see Appendix 2)
- Before the focus group discussions, the objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained from each of them before participating in the focus group discussions (see Appendix 4). Participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions before they could sign the consent forms. However, the actual names of the participants were not revealed for ethical reasons as explained and promised to the participants before their participation. Added to that, the two schools are only referred to as school A and B throughout the study. For learners who participated, permission had to be obtained from their principals and parents. It is only after the principal and parents had signed the consent forms that the learners then signed (see Appendix 3).
- During the interviews, care was taken that the feelings of the participants were taken into consideration. This was achieved by making sure that the questions were cross-checked

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by my supervisors who are experienced researchers, as well as colleagues who acted as my critical readers, before they were used with the participants.

- Anonymity of participants was maintained by making sure that their names were not used in the report. Participants were advised not to mention their names during focus group discussions.
- Special care was taken to ensure that there was no physical, psychological and emotional harm to the participants, especially the teenagers who had dropped out of school. As a result, their names were not revealed and those who did not like to be in a group discussion were individually interviewed at their own convenience.
- Participants voluntarily participated in the focus group interviews and were informed that they had a right to withdraw their voluntary participation at any stage during the interviews.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research design and methodology used in this study were described. Furthermore, research aspects such as the research instruments and data collection procedures, population and sample for the study, data analysis and ethical standards were also discussed. In the next chapter, gathered data are presented and analysed.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study was to investigate and analyse the strategies which rural schools in South Africa use to address the social problems that cause children of school going age not to complete their schooling. The research utilised a qualitative approach in which data were collected through, an analysis of documentary evidence obtained from school records, and focus group discussions, which included teachers, learners, school leavers and community representatives in school governing boards at each school where the study was conducted. Specifically, 70 participants who included 20 school learners, 20 school dropouts, 10 SGB members and 20 teachers were sampled at two schools in the Tshilamba rural community.

Data from the study are presented in two major sections. The first part presents quantifiable data from school records on school drop-outs in the Further Education and Training (FET) band, which, in South Africa, comprises Grades 10 to 12. The data are tabulated, in order to show the magnitude of the problem of school drop-outs at the two schools where the study was conducted. The tables indicate the school dropouts in actual numbers, according to year and grade, year and age and year and gender, at each of the two schools where the study was conducted (Tables 4.1 to 4.4).

The second part of the chapter presents narrative data from the study participants. The data explain the reasons why children in Tshilamba area drop out of school, the types of strategies those schools, families and communities use to minimise the problem of school dropout and the strengths and weaknesses of the identified strategies. This section concludes with the recommendations suggested by the different participants on how the identified strategies for minimising school drop-out rates can be improved.

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4.2 THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Table 4.1: School A: Learner Dropout by Year and Grade

Year	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
2010	08	10	06	24
2011	07	09	04	20
2012	08	09	0	17
Total	**23**	**28**	**10**	**61**

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Table 4.1 indicates the dropout rate by year and grade in school A. In 2010, the total number of learners who dropped out of school from grade 10 to 12 was 24, whereas in 2011 the number decreased from 24 to 20 and again decreased in 2012 from 20 to 17. From the Table, it may be inferred that the decrease in the number of drop-outs between 2010 and 2012 could be a result of some intervention strategies used by the school to curb the drop-outs at the school.

The Table also reveals that grade 11 had the highest number of drop-outs with 28, and that fewer learners at school A left school when they got to grade 12. This could be an indication that learners could be motivated to stay on and complete their education.

Table 4.2: School B: Learners Dropout by Year and Grade

Year	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
2010	11	10	0	21
2011	18	09	04	31
2012	08	09	0	17
Total	**37**	**28**	**04**	**69**

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Table 4.2 gives a brief summary of the school dropout rate at school B for grades 10 to 12 between 2010 and 2012.Compared to school A, the school had a slightly higher total number of drop-outs for the same period. However, for this school grade 10 had the highest drop-outs for the three grades. However, it is similar to school A in that, fewer learners in grade 12 also dropped out at school B.

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Table 4.3: School A: Learners Dropout by Year and age

Year	Below 16	17 to 18 years	Above 18	Total
2010	01	10	13	24
2011	02	09	09	20
2012	03	04	10	17
Total	**06**	**23**	**32**	**61**

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Table 4.4: School B: Learners Dropout by Year and age

Year	Below 16	17-18	Above 18	Total
2010	02	09	10	21
2011	02	16	13	31
2012	00	07	10	17
Total	04	32	33	69

Source: Information extracted from school enrolment records

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 give a summary of school dropout rates by age between 2010 and 2012 at the two schools where the study was conducted. The two Tables show that the higher the age of the learners, both school A and school B the more they are likely to drop-out of school. From Table 4.3, it can be seen that fewer students dropped out at the age of 16, but and this number increased from 6 to 23 and then to 32 for the above 18 age group at school A. Table 4.4 reveals that, at school B, the dropout rate also increased by age from 4 for below 16 years to 32 for 17 to 18 years and then 33 for those above 18 years. From the study, it may be concluded that the leaner's age seems to have some influence on whether the learner will drop out or not. Older teenagers, above 18 years at both schools where the study was conducted seem to be more negatively affected compared to their junior counterparts below the age of 17 years

Since quantitative data in Tables 4.1 to 4.4 do not explain the reasons why learners dropped out of school, in the next section, I present data gathered from the different study participants on how they viewed the problem of learner drop-outs, the causes and how schools in Tshilamba circuit try to prevent he problem.

4.3 DATA FROM STUDY PARTICIPANTS ON THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN TSHILAMBA CIRCUIT

To explain data gathered from the study of school records, focus group interviews were conducted with key school-based education stakeholders who included learners who were still attending school at the time of the study, children of school-going age who had dropped out of school, community representatives in the school governing boards (SGBs) at the two

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schools selected for the study and teachers at the two schools. The following section presents and discusses the gathered data, which is subdivided into the following three themes based on the aims of the study:

- The nature and magnitude of learner drop-out from school due to social problems,
- Types and nature of intervention strategies applied to address the learner drop-out problem;
- Strengths and weaknesses of intervention strategies for reducing learners drop-out

To present participant views on the above issues, the similarities and differences in the views of the different categories of participants were identified and discussed. Added to this, the researcher also made reference to the observations that were made during the focus group interviews. Such observations were recorded in the researcher's reflective journal.

4.3.1 The nature and prevalence of the school dropout problem in Tshilamba Circuit

As the school records in two schools indicated that many learners were leaving school before completing Grade twelve or Matric, it became necessary to establish whether the selected study participants were aware of the problem of school drop-outs. All the four categories of the participants, namely the learners, school dropouts, SGB members and teachers indicated that they knew about many learners who had dropped out of school. The problem of learners dropping out of school was a real social problem and this was also revealed by the fact that it was not difficult to find the 20 school dropouts of school-going age who agreed to participate in this study.

4.3.2 Views of out of school and in school children on the problem of learner school drop-outs

Both the in-school and out of school children agreed that they had friends or classmates who had left school before completing Grade 12. The following statements from learners who were still at school and those who had dropped out of school serve to illustrate their understanding of the problem of school dropouts in Tshilamba circuit:

> *Only this year I can count over 6 of my friends whom I know have left in our class. I don't know the reasons, may be they just do not like school because some children are stubborn* (Grade 12 male learner, School A).

> *We see them in the village, those who drop out of school. Even their parents or grandparents see them and do nothing. The teachers know it too. The*

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> *government must do something, even to arrest them because some take drugs and drink alcohol that is why they do not go to school* (Grade 10 male learner, School B).

> *Especially girls, they become pregnant. Some get married but some we see them doing nothing, spending their grants and with boyfriends. Such girls are even stubborn to their parents* (Grade 12 female learner, School A).

From the above statements, it is revealed that the children who still attend school are not only aware of the reasons why their classmates drop out of school, but are also against their classmates dropping out of school.

What the learners said was also repeated by the children who had left school. All of the school dropouts mentioned friends who, like them, were not at school. They knew that they were supposed to be at school, but most gave excuses like being poor, living with grandparents and having lost both parents. These participants were mostly boys who gave examples of girls who turned to prostitution after leaving school. They gave statements such as:

> *Girls have sex with different men with the aim of receiving some money. Others keep on bearing children with the aim of receiving child the support grant* (Male school dropout from school A).

> *There are many like me in the village who have dropped out. Some are working but some are doing nothing. To be at school, you need money for many things and if you have no parents to support, it's difficult* (Male school dropout from school A).

One of the boys who had dropped out of school indicated that he wanted to go back to school because he realised that some of his friends who had left school had turned to drinking beer, taking drugs and committing criminal activities. This is what he had to say to show that he regretted leaving school:

> *Some boys who are not at school are engaging themselves in drugs and alcohol abuse while others are now criminals. Some of us are working in brick yards for very little money. It is painful to leave school* (Male school leaver from school B).

From what was said, the majority of the study participants, who were children, indicated that since those who dropped out of school were not educated, most of them were just lingering around the village. Some girls get married, while other girls stay with their parents and go up and down with the aim of getting some money. It can be concluded therefore, that dropping out of school resulted in more problems for the children. This observation is also revealed by

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other researchers who say that children who drop out of school end up having many social problems such as unemployment, unwanted teenage pregnancies, poverty, unstable families for those who get married, single parenthood, infection by sexual diseases and HIV (Debra, 2008; Runhare, 2010).

4.3.3 Teachers and SGBs views on the problem of learner school dropout

In this study, there were two groups of adult participants who took part in focus group discussions at each of the two schools. These were community members who were representatives in the SGBs at their schools and teachers at both school A and school B. They were also asked to express their views on whether they were aware of the problem of children who dropped out of school. The teachers were asked to give evidence from the school while the SGB members were asked to give examples of what they see in the community.

Like the learners and children who had dropped out from school, all the teachers said that they could remember the actual names of some of the learners who had recently left school. Teachers also agreed that the problem of learners dropping out of school was a huge issue at most schools in rural Tshilamba. In fact, one of the female teachers from School B was quick to indicate that: "So far in my class which is Grade Ten class, I have 10 students who dropped out of school, and of these six are girls and four are boys".

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The teachers said that they were aware of the learners who dropped out of school since they spent most of the time with learners, and that they have just accepted the situation as they could not change it because it always happened at all schools. To show how wide spread the problem was, one teacher had this to say:

> *Most schools in rural areas lose many pupils by the end of the year because of poverty. Some learners are not monitored; parents just lose hope or have no money to spend on education* (Male teacher, School A).

Asked to indicate if there was a difference between the number of boys and girls who dropped out of school, the majority of the teachers believed that both girls and boys are affected equally. A female teacher from School B summarised this observation by pointing out that:

> *There is no difference between boys and girls who drop out of school. You may find that in one year there are more girls who dropped out than boys and vice versa* (Female teacher, School B).

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However, there were some teachers who said that more girls who drop-out of school do so because of teenage pregnancy, early marriage, sexual abuses by employed male adults and even some male teachers who propose love to girls.

Teachers added that, in schools, the problem of learners dropping out of school is clearly indicated by the way teachers are moved from one school to another at the beginning of every year when school enrolment drops. To illustrate that, one elderly male teacher from School B complained when he said that: *"I once worked next to my home, but due to the problem of learners dropping out I am no longer working there. The Department redeployed me".*

The views of the participants within the school system, as well as those of the school dropouts were not different from those of community members in the SGBs. For example, all SGB members gave a list of names of children from the neighbourhood who were no longer in school. This was illustrated by one SGB member who emphasised that: *"Yes, we know them; even my next door neighbour has two children who left school this year. Sometimes you may not ask why because the parents allow it".* For ethical reasons, the names of the drop-outs were regarded as classified information.

Members of the School Governing Board further expressed that the school dropout rate of the boys and girls was the same. They, however, pointed out that the difference lay in the reasons for dropping out of school. Various reasons as to why children dropout of school were given, for example peer pressure, lack of parental guidance, drug and alcohol abuse.

The majority of participants indicated that the issue of children who drop out of the school is a major problem as it is difficult for these drop-outs to get employment. In support of that, one participant from the SGB said that: "*These children will not be employed and will engage themselves in abusing drugs and alcohol abuse as well as gangsterism*". These findings correlate with those of Rumberger (2001) who stated that youth who dropped out of high school are more likely to be depressed, feel alienated, join gangs, use drugs and alcohol, engage in violent behaviours, and end up incarcerated.

4.3.4 Learners' views on the causes of learner drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit

Having established that the problem of school drop-outs existed in Tshilamba circuit the study sought to find out the major causes of dropping out of schooling Tshilamba circuit rural

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high schools. The participants involved in this study were given an opportunity to air their views on the major causes of dropping out. Both male and female learners expressed various views on the key causes of dropping out in the selected rural high schools. A female participant from school B expressed that:

> *The majority of children in our school drop-out due to various reasons such as disciplinary problems, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, and poverty at home (female learner from school B).*

On the major causes of dropping out, one male learner participant from school B articulated that, "*Most learners drop-out due to drugs and alcohol abuse and lack of parental involvement in their education*". A male participant from school A alleged that *"they are no longer at school because of teenage pregnancy"*.

The majority of the learner participants stated that some of the learners drop-out of school because they are abused by parents and teachers while lack of parental involvement in the education of their children featured a lot in the discussion identified. Poverty at home was identified by most learner participants as one other key cause of school drop outs. The findings from this study resonate with those of a study by Entwisle and Hayduck (cited in Steinberg, 1993) who revealed that parents who encourage school success set higher standards for their children's performance in all their school work, as well as homework completion.

Whilst the majority of the learner participants identified reasons for dropping out as lack of parental involvement and poverty at home, they also pointed out that belonging to a child-headed family where parents are working far away from home or where both parents are dead because of various reasons like accidents, natural causes or as a results of HIV and AIDS, was also one of the main reasons of dropping out. These findings correlate with a study that was conducted by Nethengwe (2009), which showed that some parents, in the rural areas of Limpopo Province, more especially in Mutale Municipal, leave their families to work or look for jobs in urban areas.

The study also sought to find out what the community of Tshilamba to major causes of dropping out of school. Participants revealed that there was a lot of abuse of drugs and alcohol abuse in the community, and this resulted in learners dropping out of school. This view correlates with Broefin Brenner's (1992) developmental theory, which points out that

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the availability of drugs and alcohol in the community is one factor that influences adolescents to engage in drug and alcohol abuse.

Learners went on to reveal some of the causes of in the community which led to learners dropping out. One female learner from school A was quoted as saying: "Lack of recreational facilities and poor infrastructure" was a major cause of students dropping out of schools in rural communities like Tshilamba. To add on to that, a male learner from school B said that *"There is a lack of educated people who can act as role models and motivate us as learners"*. The learner expressed that the community has very few educated role models to emulate.

Learner participants were also asked to point out how their teachers contributed to learners dropping out at their school. A male learner from school A said that: *"There is unequal treatment of learners by teachers, in our school,"* and the same participant also indicated that *"...those learners who are not academically gifted or those of low IQ and learners from poor families are not treated in the same way as those of a high IQ and those from educated or well up families" (*Male learner form school A*)*.Learners with a low IQ felt the treatment they were given by their teachers was not the same as that of their counterparts, hence they dropped out of school.

Love relationships between learners and teachers were another factor that led to learners dropping out. Another male participant from school B said that "*In our school, there are teachers who fall in love with learners. If learners refuse to have a love relationship with a particular educator, the concerned learner will be made to repeat the grade"*. Learners felt victimised when they were forced to have a relationship with their educators, hence, they dropped out of school.

Learners also indicated that they dropped out of school due to the fact that they were pessimistically labelled and they did not like their private lives discussed at school. A male participant from school A raised his view in this way:

> *These teachers from our community talk about our home situations in front of other learners; they can even tell one that one would not be able to pass grade 12 since there is no one from your family who has ever managed to pass it (*Male participant from school A).

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This reveals that teachers who labelled the learners negatively at school contributed to their dropping out. Learners who were labelled as non-achievers in life behaved the way they were labelled and dropped out of school.

The findings reveal that it was not only teachers who contributed to learner drop-outs. In this study, the researcher sought to find out how other learners at school caused other learners to drop out of school. The majority of the participants mentioned the issue of bullying by other learners as a push factor that influenced the weaker and the bullied to drop out of school. One male participant from school B had this to say *"negative or poor communication between learners themselves can influence one to drop-out of school"*. The finding that the learners scold and degrade each other using their parents' status in the community, and family background correlates with Debra's (2008:54) findings, which show that most of the children who dropped out early from school reported that they were pushed out by their peers who bullied them and called them names.

4.3. 5 School leavers' views on causes of learner drop-out in Tshilamba circuit

Having heard different views from learners on the causes of school drop-outs, the researcher had an opportunity to interview the school drop-outs themselves to find out their reasons for dropping out of school. In response to the question, participants stated that different experiences had made them drop-out of school before completing their grade 12. One of the female participants who had dropped-out of school said: *"I had a poor relationship with my teacher and fellow classmates"*. A male participant from school A said the following: *"I left the school because I repeated grade 10 for several times and at home they no longer had money to keep on paying for me to go to school"*. The statements from the two school dropouts reveal that learners dropped out of school due to poor relationships with their educators and classmates, as well as due to repeated grades.

These results correlate with a study done by Rhumberger (1997), who discovered that, more than 50% of the drop-outs left because of school-related reasons. These reasons include a dislike for school, and being expelled or suspended. Twenty percent (20%) of the dropouts cited economic reasons for dropping out of school. The following were the quotes from female and a male drop-out:

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A male dropout participant had this to say:
I left school because my teacher used to tell me that I would never pass his geography and Tshivenda texts; when I failed his geography and Tshivenda I decided to drop-out (Female drop-out from school A).

A female dropout participant added:
I left school because I was expelled by my teachers. Their behaviour towards me made me to dislike school because most teachers showed no love for me (Male drop-out from school B).

A male dropout participant also said the following:

> *Some teacher scolded me and used offensive words about my family situation in front of other learners, and teachers told me that I would never pass and said that I would only pass when donkeys got horns* (male dropout from school A).

From the above statements, that teachers and the school management have a strong responsibility safe and child-friendly school and learning environments, which could act as a pull factor for keeping learners in school (UNICEF 2008).

The school drop-out participants were asked to describe the relationship they had with their teachers during the time when they were still at school. It was the view of most of the participants that they left school because the relationship they had with their teachers was poor and uncomfortable. This poor relationship made them drop out of school. These views are reflected by Clabaugh (1995) who stated that students are likely to drop out if there is an absence of positive social relationships and lack of positive and caring environment.

One female drop-out from school B pointed out that, *"When I come to school wearing an old uniform the teachers scold me about my family situation"*. This view is in line with Fin (1989) who states that when a sense of belonging is absent, students are likely to have a higher rate of disruptive behaviour, and may end up dropping out of school.

The study also sought to unearth the participants' main problems which they experienced before they dropped out of school. A female dropout participant who was in school B expressed the following: *"My problem was that, male teachers used to ask to have a relationship with me and when I refused, I failed my grade"* (Female dropout from school B). A female dropout who was in school A also added that, *"I had problems with my geography teacher and I was rejected by my peers"*. The quotations reveal that learners dropped out of school as a result of poor and inappropriate relationships with their educators.

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Participants were requested to narrate their school experiences. A female respondent who was in school A was quoted saying, "*It was very bad, because the principal used to send me back home for failing to pay school fund*" (Female dropout from school A). One male respondent who was in school A also stated that, "*I was treated unfairly by educators since educators treat students from poor families in a negative way*" (Male drop-out from school A). The two school leavers revealed that it is a challenge to belong to a disadvantaged family since learners are labelled and treated according to their family background. They are even sent away for school fees that they cannot afford to pay.

4.3.6 Views of School Governing Board Representatives on causes of learner dropout in Tshilamba circuit

The researcher went on to solicit for information from members of the SGB. The researcher sought to find out the reasons why children of school-going age in their communities are no longer going to school. The members of the SGB expressed a number of views on some children were no longer going to school. Participants suggested that poverty and an inability to pay for the children's schooling were major reasons for dropping out. For example, the chairpersons of the SGBs both schools A and B were quick to point out that poverty at home made most parents unable to pay school fees for their children.

> *To have a child at school does not mean paying fees only. Today children want many things like pocket money, good clothes and even cell phones. Some children drop out to look for work so that they can buy all these nice things that other children like them have* (SGB chair, School A).

The same view on poverty was indicated by the chairperson of the SGB at school B who said:

> *We used to go to school without shoes or anything to eat in the past. Today, the government pays fees for children from poor communities but today children want other things that parents cannot afford* (SGB chair, School B).

The other members of the SGBs, in general, also believe that both girls and boys who dropped out of school did so because there was poverty in their homes. They also disclosed that some children drop-out of school because they are being bullied by other learners in the school. An SGB member from school A was quoted as saying that, "*At times learners drive each other away from school, for example, if there are gangs, and learners feel threatened, they drop out of school*" An SGB member from school B indicated that, "*Some learners drop out of school because they repeatedly failed their grades and are made to redo them until*

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they give up". The other reasons given by SGB members for school drop-outs include repeating of grades, expulsion from school, and a poor school environment or structures which make learning difficult.

The interviews also revealed that some of the girls drop out of school because they have to look after their siblings in situations where a family has failed to find a nanny. An SGB member from school B indicated that, *"Some families cannot afford to pay a maid so; a learner has to drop out of school to take care of the young ones at home"*. Some girl learners drop out of school to take care of their little brothers and sisters at home, while the parent or guardian goes to work. It was, however, revealed that teenage pregnancy was also a major cause of school drop-out, especially among female learners.

The SGB members who were interviewed pointed out a number of factors that cause boy learners to drop out of school. An SGB member from school B indicated that, *"The other problem is that learners, especially boys, influence each other to leave school and engage in drugs and alcohol"*. The indication here is that most boys who drop-out do so as a result of peer pressure.

Participants were asked to express their views on the causes within the family which lead to learners dropping out. Participants noted various reasons with the family that could causes learners to drop-out of school. An SGB member from school A expressed that, "*Some parents are simply not involved in their children's school work, hence the learner fails to realise the importance of education"*. Over and above poverty within some families being identified as one of the major causes, members of the SGB also identified that lack of parental involvement in their children's education as a cause for children dropping out of school.

The SGB members also noted single-parenthood, as well as child- headed families contribute a lot to children dropping out of school. The results of this study are reflected in a study by Debra (2008) who stated that poverty in families are the deprivation of needs such family mobility results in poor shelter and lack of love from both parents. Factors such as those presented by Debra (2008) normally distract learners from academic achievement and attendance. These distractions may lead to learners dropping out of school early.

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SGB members were also of the view that children drop out of school due to family instability, as well as alcohol and drug abuse. Some of the members had this to say:

> *A family situation in which both parents are usually fighting in the home and showing no respect to their children results in an unstable family and it influences the rate of learner dropout* (SGB member School A).

> *Drunkenness, or where both parents are abusing drugs and alcohol, normally lead to failure by parents to involve themselves in the education of their children and they care less about what their children do at school. This pushes the learners out of school* (SGB member School B).

This research revealed that SGB members believe that the nature of the structure and what goes on within the school can lead to students dropping out. An SGB member from school B said that, *"Some teachers sexually abuse learners especially girl learners"*. Teachers are, thus seen as contributing to the cause of learner drop outs.

These views are reflected by Swanson (2010) who stated that to prevent learners dropping out teachers have to be caring so as to give students every chance of success in the classroom. UNICEF (2008) also overemphasises the need for teachers and the school management to promote safe and friendly learning environments so to encourage learners to stay in school.

The issue of poverty in the home was also posited by SGB members as one of the causes of school drop-outs within the school. The interviewed SGB members pointed out that children from poor homes may drop out of school due to circumstances such as the ones stated in the following extract:

> *When learners loose text books, it can cause them to drop-out of school, especially when the parent is unable to replace the textbook due to poverty* (SGB member School A).

> *Learners can drop out of school because of being bullied by other learners who are tougher and stronger than them (*SGB member School B).

The research sought views on how the structure, events and functioning of the community could contribute to learners dropping out of school. Participant SGB members indicated that the community lacked recreational facilities, and that there was poor infrastructure available in the community to occupy the learners after school and prevent them from engaging in undesirable behaviours.

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The participants went on to indicate that the availability of bottle stores and bars was also a factor in learner drop outs. For example, an SGB chairperson from one of the sampled schools, school A, revealed that, *"These children are abusing alcohol and drugs in their community."* Another SGB member from school B indicated that, *"Learners buy alcohol from bars and go to the parks to drink "*. This view shows that, even though liquor outlets have an age restriction, children can gain access to them and buy alcohol because the owners of the bars are not strict on age as they are more concerned about getting money. It would seem that young people who have some casual jobs are just treated as adults as long as they have money to spend.

It was also the view of SGB members that the environment in a community plays a major role in the schooling of learners. An SGB member from school A indicated that, *"In our communities adults engage themselves in drugs and alcohol, children also find themselves engaging in drugs and alcohol and this seems to be the norm of the community"*. The quotation shows that learners copy behaviours from the society they live in. Children in a society would want to identify roles models amongst adults in their communities. This means that if their role models are drug and alcohol users, learners will follow suit and become drug and alcohol abusers as well.

4.3.7 Views of teachers on causes of learner dropout in Tshilamba circuit

The study went on to solicit information on the reasons for learner dropout from school from educators at the two selected schools in the circuit. Teachers were asked to articulate their views on the factors they believed to be the causes of learners dropping out of school. Like other study participants, most teachers who participated in focus group discussions indicated the following as the main causes within the school that influence learners to drop-out:

- Poor relationships between learners and teachers;
- Poor relationships among learners themselves;
- Sexual abuse by male teachers;
- School environment which is not conducive to learning; and
- Shortage of teachers and text books in some of the rural high schools.

Schools also have a role to play in curbing the challenge of learner drop outs. A participant male teacher from school A stated that: *"If schools could spot the learners who have problems early enough and employ measures to stop them from dropping out the number of*

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drop outs could be minimal". The quotation reveals that schools are failing to identify those learners who are at risk of dropping out of school so as to help them to avoid dropping out.

A female teacher from the same school was quoted saying: *"School discipline is one way to ensure that learners are conforming to the requirements of the school and the society. These include the requirement that they should be at school"* (Participant Female teacher from school A). This reveals that the school is failing to maintain discipline and to reduce the failure rate since repeating a grade is regarded as a major cause of learners dropping out.

Resources available in schools have an impact on their learning and even in motivating them to learn. A female teacher from school B stated that: *"Our schools do not have enough material in the form of textbooks and there is no library to occupy the learners"*. Participants also noted that because of inadequate funds to buy textbooks and exercise books the schools lacked facilities and resources such as libraries, text books and stationery. This has resulted in some learners leaving school before their grade 12.

Teachers who participated in the study were asked to state those factors that exist within families, which can cause children to drop out of school. Teachers who participated in this study had similar views. A male teacher from school B stated that: *"Some learners are affected in their schooling by their family status. For example, a single parent may at times not be able to attend to all the needs of her/his child*". A male teacher from school A stated the following: *"In some families, parents do not guide and assist their children in their school work because they have no time for them as they spend most of their time drinking alcohol"*. Participants mentioned factors such as family discipline, socio-economic factors, excessive drinking by parents and lack of parental involvement in the children's education.

The study by Debra (2008:53) reflects similar views to those of teachers in this study. It revealed that students from single, divorced and remarried parents are more likely to experience conflicts, and lack of parental monitoring and discipline that relate to mental health difficulties may actually lead to learners dropping out of school and developing problematic behaviours.

Other factors noted by the teachers that contribute to learner drop out from the community were the effects of HIV & AIDS. One male teacher from school B noted that: "*We do have*

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child headed families where both parents have passed away due to HIV & AIDS." Child-headed families are a reflection of a family without guidance. When learners lack guidance from home, this may result in them dropping out of school.

In view of all these challenges that the respondents identified as causes of school drop-out in Tshilamba circuit, the next section presents the views of study participants on intervention strategies that are in place at their schools to redress the problem of learners absconding or leaving school altogether.

4.4 THE TYPES AND NATURE OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES APPLIED TO MINIMISE LEARNER DROP-OUT AT SOUTH AFRICAN RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

Participants in this study identified the causes of learners dropping out of school in Tshilamba circuit in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. All the study participants, in this study, were asked to identify and discuss what was being done by their schools or communities to redress the social problem of learner dropout in their schools. Focus group discussions were conducted for each category of participants, namely learners who were still in school, those who had dropped out, teachers and community representatives in the SGBs. Their views are presented next.

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4.4.1 Learners' views on intervention strategies to minimise learner drop-out

Learners who participated in the study had the opportunity to responding to the question on the measures that their communities had put in place to curb the problem of school drop outs. One female learner in school A said that:

> *In our communities, there are some drop-in centres where learners from poor families go after school and during the holidays, in order to get food. In these centres, learners are fed and they go home full (Female learner from school A).*

The quotation reveals that there are organisations that have identified the challenges learners have, and they offer the needed assistance. These organisations work in collaboration with the schools, and operate in designated areas to feed learners.

4.4.2 National School Nutrition Programme

Most of the learners went further to explain that feeding was actually done at their schools so that learners from rural communities do not bother their parents asking for pocket money or carrying some food to school. Learners at both schools seemed to agree that the feeding scheme existed not only at their school but in other schools as well. The following are

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extracts that express the existence of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which is a national programme for all schools in poor communities like Tshilamba circuit (Government of South Africa, 1994:46). A male learner from school B confirmed that:

> *All schools in this area have a feeding point for lunch and all learners are allowed to eat food. So why learners drop out because they are poor is out of choice. But we girls are stubborn; we want things like cell phones and make ups.*

Another student from School B expressed a similar view when he said that feeding points at schools helped to reduce the number of learner dropouts in poor rural communities in South Africa. In his expression of gratitude to the government, the grade 12 male learner observed the following:

> *I am so thankful to government for feeding us children from rural schools. I once dropped out but when I saw that I had no bright future after leaving school, I returned. Sometimes there may be no food at home, but here at school we are guaranteed a fair meal daily* [Male learner, school A).

It is, therefore, clear that the NSNP, which the post-apartheid government of South Africa launched (Government of South Africa, 1994:46), is an important intervention for minimizing the problem of learner drop-outs within South African poor communities such as Tshilamba. The respondents of this study, therefore, indicated that their schools provide learners with food through nutrition programmes that ensure that learners do not attend lessons on empty stomachs. These results are also similar to those in a study done by Buxton (2010) which indicates that a hungry child cannot learn effectively. Buxton (2010) went on to indicate that a child is distracted in school work by hunger. Therefore, a learner is likely to experience decline in his/her school work due to health related problems.

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4.4.3 Assistance with fees

Research indicates that school fees are one key reason why children from poor socio-economic backgrounds drop out from school (Hunt, 2006). Views from learners at both schools revealed that failure to pay school fees is not a major reason for dropping out because their schools fall within the non-fee paying category schools in South Africa. The following two extracts from both schools illustrate this commonly held view:

> *It is a lie to say children in South Africa drop out because of fees. For example at our school, we don't pay school fees just because the government pays for us to allow even the poorest to be in school because education is a right for all children* (Male grade 11 learner, School A).

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A learner from the other school B also agreed with this, and even added that education is free for poor communities for South African such as Tshilamba circuit:

> *Education is free in all rural areas like ours and even all parents of children who are not in school know it. It is a crime not to send a child to school today because there are no fees to be paid. People should not blame the government if they are not educated because it is spending a lot to educate us* (Female grade 11 learner, school B).

From these views, it can, therefore, be concluded that one main reason why in which the government of post-apartheid South Africa dealt with the problem of school dropout in rural areas such as Tshilamba where this study was conducted, by establishing schools where students do not have to pay fees. Even in higher education, the government caters for the poor through fees grants at provincial levels and through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

The researcher went on to ask the learners to mention what their teachers were doing to prevent learners from dropping out of school. A female learner from school B revealed that: "*Teachers spent their time being at school trying to educate and encourage us as learners to read and to be attached to the school*" (Female respondent from school B). The quotation reveals that teachers go an extra mile to ensure that learners are occupied all the time so as to make the school interesting for learners and reduce the number of drop-out to an extent of dropping out of school.

Most learners from both school A and B agreed that teachers are doing a lot to try and prevent school drop outs. In line with this observation, one male learner praised teachers saying, "*Most teachers teach after school in their homes. They also teach during holiday time to cover what could not be covered during lesson time or to help those who were absent in class*". Some learners revealed that there were some teachers who assisted poor but hardworking children with things such as school uniforms and reading books.

> *I know of my friend whose uniform was bought by one of our senior teachers and she passed her grade 12 last year. Such teachers would not tell anybody to protect the dignity of the child, but there are such good teachers here* (Female grade 12 learner, School B).

This quotation reveals that there are some teachers who take it upon themselves as educators to ensure that they retain learners at school, especially those that are

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excelling. Teachers provide for needy learners, and this prevents the learners from dropping out of school. In essence, a number of measures have been put in place to ensure that learners do not drop out of school.

4.4.5 Out of school children's views on interventions to reduce school dropout rates

In order to explore what schools were doing to prevent learner wastage through absenteeism and dropping out, children who had left school before completion were also asked to describe anything that they thought was done by the school to prevent them from dropping out of school. Their views were not any different from those expressed by the learners who were still in school.

These out of school participants indicated that the schools had played a significant role in trying to prevent the problem of children dropping out of school before grade 12. Most of the respondents listed what their schools had done to prevent them dropping out of school. The list included extramural activities, provision of text and exercise books, introduction of capitation grants or no-fee schools, introduction of feeding schemes at school or the nutrition programme.

To illustrate that school dropouts were aware that their parents do not have to pay fees or buy books for them to be in school, two of the children who had dropped out of school had this to say:

> *Yes, I am aware that we don't pay fees at school. But there are other things that we girls need, in order to go on with school, such as money to buy other things and for transport which the government does not pay for* (Female dropout, school B).

A male dropout from the same school also made a similar justification that: *"Even for us boys that is the same. We need good clothes and pocket money like girls. So even if fees are paid by government, there are other things we need".*

The majority of the participants indicated that the school had done something to prevent them from dropping out of school by providing motivating activities such as sports. One male dropout participant stated that:

> *Teachers in our school used curricular activities such as soccer; traditional dance and volley ball to keep learners at school. Some of the learners who*

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> *achieved well were given trophies and medals* (Male dropout from school B).

Another female learner who had also dropped out of school supported this view by starting that:

> *There are some people who were not good in class but played soccer or music, and are great people today. Such things, if they are done at school can make schooling enjoyable than just books and books throughout* (Female dropout, School B).

It is interesting to note from the above two views that if educators and school management knew and catered for different abilities and interests in the school, the problem of learner-dropout could be minimised.

4.4.6 Views of community representatives in SGBs on interventions to curb learner dropout

The study went on to find out from the SGB members who are the community representatives of parents working in collaboration with the school, what the role of the community is in the reduction of learner drop outs in schools. *"In our community we as parents encourage the learners to work hard by recognising those who have excelled. We have a trophy and cash that we give to learners who do well each year" (SGB chairperson from school B)*. Members of the SGBS revealed that they reward learners who work hard as a way of encouraging them to stay at school and work hard.

In general, members of the SGBs at both schools also revealed that they give out food parcels to the poor in their communities so that their children would have food, and not drop out of school. An SGB member from school B indicated that: *"We work together with organisations that sponsor us with food to give to the needy learners"*. The SGB chairperson from school A indicated that, *"The school identifies needy learners and then we ensure they have food parcels to take home"*. Feeding learners in school was identified as one strategy that retained learners in school.

Some of the SGB members revealed that there are some organisations that assist learners in school with clothing. An SGB member from school B stated that, *"Phalaphala FM a local radio station contributes to the welfare of the learners by providing shoes to the needy children"*. Another SGB member from school A indicated that: *"There are drop-in centres where different food parcels are dropped in so that learners can be fed to prevent them*

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dropping out of school because of hunger". Learners coming from needy families are assisted with food and clothing as a way of ensuring that they do not drop out of school.

The SGB chairperson at one of the schools where the study was conducted stated that as parent representatives working together with the school teachers, they had a role of enlightening the learners and their parents about the importance of the school. He had this to say:

> *We have to tell them about the value of education and encourage those who have already dropped out of school to re-enrol with Abet so that they can be educated* (Female SGB member, from school A).

A male SGB member from school B echoed the same sentiment about the role in educating the community about the value of education in the life of the children. This is what he had to say:

> *Once parents and children know about the value of education, they will work hard to send children to school. It's not about being rich but sacrifice. I always tell my children and relatives that we must learn from Mandela who was a rural boy but became a lawyer and president of the country* (Male SGB secretary, School B).

The study also sought to find out from SGBs members what their schools engage in to reduce the number of learners who drop out of school before grade 12. The responses of the SGB members at one school were not very different from what the parent representatives at the other school had to say. Responding to the question on intervention of strategies, one male SGB participant from school A indicated that: *"At our school, learners receive free food daily and this keeps them at school as they know they will be fed at the end of each day.*

As already indicated earlier, another participant also indicated that schools go a long way to identify learners from poor families, and to look for ways to obtain things such as shoes and uniforms for them. However, a female SGB member from the same school added that: *"When we help with donations, we usually select hard working learners from poor families so that these donations are not wasted".*

SGB members in schools have advocated for extra lessons to assist those learners with learning difficulties. An SGB member from school A stated that: *"We as parents agreed in a parents meeting that learners with problems in certain subjects can remain at school for extra lessons".* Another SGB member from school B indicated that: *"In our school there are*

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holiday lessons to assist learners attain better grades" After school classes and holiday lessons were done in the schools to occupy the learners and to develop interest in their school work so that they do not drop out from school.

4.4.7 Views of teachers on interventions to curb learner dropout

The research went on to seek the views of teachers, on how their schools reduce the rate of learners that drop out of school. To redress the increasing rate of school dropouts, most educators at the schools indicated that the selected schools were improving the learning condition of the learners by employing teachers with relevant teaching skills and by encouraging learners to work hard in their school work. Having knowledgeable and skilled teachers helps learners to gain confidence and to pass their Matric. The female participant of school A was quick to point out that *"Good and hardworking teachers are like the heart of a school because all learning and school success or failure depends on the quality of teachers a school recruits"*.

In support of the need for quality teachers, a female teacher at school B also indicated that:

> *We as teachers should be community leaders and specialists in guiding and supporting our learner. We should to keep them busy so that they are motivated to stay in school. As they say, an idle mind is the devil's workshop; if learners are not kept busy, they do all sorts of bad things or even leave school if they don't see the benefits* (Female senior teacher, school B).

One way of keeping students occupied in the school, according to another teacher from the same school, is for teachers to have broad class and out of class activities that interest the different learners found in the school. Like some of the children who had dropped out of school, the teacher also recommended core-curricular activities such as sports and music. In order to keep children in school, it was observed that:

> *In our school we use extramural activities such as soccer, volley ball, traditional dance and sports in order to reduce dropout rate. Children naturally like outdoor games to refresh themselves from academic activities* (Male teacher, school B).

As the out-of-school children also indicated, sporting or non-academic activities in a school can help to cater for academically gifted children and to explore other talents such as music or sporting that have seen many people rising to fame.

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4.5 ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES USED TO MINIMISE SCHOOL DROP-OUT RATE

In order to have an insight into the interventions which schools and communities were implementing to minimise drop-out rate in Tshilamba circuit, all the participants of this study were asked to indicate the strengths, as well as weaknesses of the identified interventions. This helped the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the intervention strategies to school drop-out which schools in Tshilamba employed. The following section presents the views of learners, children who had dropped from school, community representatives in the SGBs and the educators.

4.5.1 Learners' assessment of intervention strategies used to minimise learner drop-out

Learners from the schools under study in Tshilamba circuit were asked do state the worth of the methods their schools are using to stop learners dropping out of school. Learners expressed various views on the intervention strategies used by schools in the Tshilamba circuit to reduce school drop-out rates. The popular responses from the participants indicated that schools are providing food, and this means that even children from poor families can benefit. A female learner from school A expressed that: *"At least these days I am attentive until the end of the school day because I would have had something to eat from the food we are given".*

Extracurricular activities done in the schools were also indicated as one of the measures schools use to prevent learners from drop-out. A male learner from school A stated that: "*I enjoy athletics and football so much, I would not have realised my talent if I was not at school,"* while a female learner from school B expressed similar views, "W*hen every year starts, I cannot wait for netball time and I want to play for the national team one day."*

Learners went on to say that the issuing of free text books was also a strong strategy that the schools were using to curb the problem of learner drop-outs. The participants also indicated that the school also outsources some teachers from different schools to help students who are unable to understand the subject matter quickly so that they can achieve better results. A female learner from school B said that: *"In our school, teachers are used and teaching us after school hours and during the holiday".*

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The researcher went on to enquire from the learners what they view as not good about the methods applied by their schools to prevent learners from dropping out of school. A participant from school B said that: "*Corporal punishment should not be used*". Participants argued that corporal punishment and the expulsion of learners were in appropriate methods of correcting learners when they misbehave or do not do their work. Respondents went on to reveal that expelling learners from school destroys learners in a way that when those learners come back their peers would have already done a lot of tasks. This means that they cannot catch up with others. A female participant from school A said that, *"we are suspended or expelled from the school without enquiring or finding out the real reasons why the learners did what they did"*.

Learners were asked to state what the school should have done to reduce the number of learners from dropping out of school. Participants from school A and B respectively indicated that:

> *The school is failing to identify learners who are at risk of dropping out of school very early and make follow ups in order to find out the cause of regular learners absenteeism that normally lead to drop outs (female participant from school A).*

> *The school is failing to encourage learners from poor families to work hard since such learners are always at risk of repeating grades and dropping out of school* (female participant from school B).

The indication is that it is not only the responsibility of the school to encourage learners to come to school, but the responsibility of the parents as well. Parents should be involved in the education of their children so that they can encourage them to work hard, and at the same time curb absenteeism.

4.5.2 School dropouts' assessment of intervention strategies used to minimise school drop-out rates

Although the schools have some strategies to curb the problem of learner drop out, those strategies seem not to be working since learners continue dropping out of school. From the school drop-outs, the researcher found out why the strategies employed by the schools to reduce learner drop outs were not working. A male dropout participant who was in school B said that:

> *The school allowed pregnant girls to come to school as a way of reducing the dropout rate, but the negative part of it is when those girls are required to have someone to look after them at school. This is very difficult (Male drop-out from school B).*

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According to the participants, teenage pregnancy is seen as a passport to dropping out of school. Participants also indicated that, even though teenage pregnancy is accepted in school, the problem comes after the birth of the child when there is no one to take care of the child. Learner drop outs also believe that some parents fail to accompany their children who are pregnant, to school so that they can look after them.

Learners who had dropped out went on to reveal that there were anomalies with the feeding scheme. For example, another male dropout participant indicated that: "The amount or portion of food we used to receive from the feeding scheme was not enough for us." This meant that learners still went to class hungry even though there was a feeding scheme in the school.

Participants noted that the reasons why such strategies are not working is that at times a strategy is implemented and then along the way it is stopped. It was indicated that feeding schemes can be put to place but then problems develop along the way, and these are halted for a while, leaving learners to starve.

Issues such as corporal punishment and the suspension of learners were also mentioned by the participants. Drop outs indicated that corporal punishment drove them away from school. The drop out also pointed that suspension was another factor that drove them out of school pre-maturely.

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4.5.3 SBGs' assessment of intervention strategies used to minimise school drop-out

The researcher went on to determine the strengths of the methods that the school is doing to reduce the problem of learner dropouts. A Female member of the SGB from school A revealed her views, on the subject when she stated that: "*There is a nutrition programme and learners are no longer paying school fees*".

The SGB members who participated in the study pointed to the introduction of the capitation grant and the school feeding scheme as main strategies in curbing the problem of learner drop outs since most of the children in rural areas are from poor families. In his study, Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) revealed that the introduction of the school feeding scheme has double benefits of improving attendance and the general well-being of

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children. Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) indicate that it is the feeding scheme that retains learners in school, while the researcher found that it is the feeding plus the capitation grant that keeps learners coming to school. Furthermore, another participant explained that *"teachers at schools are teaching these learners during the holidays and even on the weekends as way of occupying the learners so that they remain focused on school work"*. The participant argued that because of the grants and feeding scheme learners need to be focussed, in order for them not to drop out of school.

The researcher also set off to describe the weaknesses of the school system in reducing the problem of learner drop outs. Most of the SGB members who participated in the study viewed the use of corporal punishment as a threat to their children. A female SGB member from school A, pointed out that: *"...Corporal punishment is not allowed by the policy of education"*. A male SBG member from school B indicated that, "*Teachers, in their classrooms, still use corporal punishment to discipline learners."* This means that teachers are exercising corporal punishment against government policy, and in the process, are driving learners out of school.

SGB members were asked to say what they thought should be done by community representatives to reduce the number of learner drop outs. In response to the question, the majority of the participants indicated that they should work in collaboration with teachers, learners and the community to help learners not to drop out of school. A male SGB member from school A, angrily expressed that: *"We are unable to work in our pace because the school is using us as rub stamp when we instructed the SMT to invite meetings with learners and parents we are not allowed"*. Participants revealed that convening meeting to curb the problem of school drop outs was in some instances, a challenge. It is important for stake holders to work together to cub the problem of school drop outs.

However, community members are failing to support and motivate children to focus on their school work. Participants also complained that lack of parental involvement in their children school work also leads to children dropping out. They believe that if community members work with the school and learners effectively, the drop out problem could be curbed.

The researcher sought to find out from members of the SGB that which the school is not doing, but should be doing to help learners not to drop out of school. A female SGB member from school A, who participated in the study, indicated that: *"The school is failing to identify*

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the causes or factors that influence learners to drop out of school; hence, the school is failing to reduce learner drop-out rates". Another SGB member from school B believed that: *"...the schools do not bother about learners who dropped out of school".* This view shows that schools could be in a position to bring back the learners who drop out of school to school if they follow them up and try to address their predicaments.

SGB members agreed that if the learner is no longer coming to school, it should be the duty of the school management to make a follow up and find out the main causes of the learner's absence and address them so that the learner could come back to school. Participants also proposed the need to promote a good relationship between learners and teachers. These views reveal that the learners need attention and healthy relationships with their teachers. These views are in line with the views of Debra (2008) who argued that student perceptions that teachers do not care about the mandate that unfair and unsafe discipline practices prevail in schools contribute to the learner dropping out of school.

4.5.4 Teachers' assessment of intervention strategies used to minimise school drop-out

The researcher asked teachers to evaluate the strengths of the strategies used by the schools to reduce learner drop outs. Teachers noted that the nutrition schemes and the no fee schools that were introduced by the Department of Education help curb the problem of learner drop outs.

Teachers who participated in the study indicated that the methods that were being used by schools to reduce learner drop outs had their weaknesses. On the issue of using feeding schemes as a strategy to curb learner drop outs, a female teacher from school B, who was also a member of the school nutrition or feeding scheme, said that: *"It is time consuming for teachers since they are supposed to make sure that each learner receives something to eat during break".*

The other weakness of the nutrition or feeding scheme strategy as a method to reduce school drop outs is that teachers are expected to complete some nutrition files from time to time. Teachers found the exercise of completing files time-consuming. One of the male teachers from school B, who is also a member of the feeding scheme, expressed that: *"After being fed, or after lunch, sometimes, the learners don't fully participate in class, and they always fall asleep in their classrooms".*

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The researcher asked teachers who participated in the study to indicate the strengths of the methods used by community or village leaders to reduce the number of learners who drop out from school. Teachers who participated in the study indicated that community or village leaders are now not employing people without grade 12 to work in community projects. This has resulted in many children trying to go to school to obtain a grade 12 certificate so that they can get jobs. A female participant from school A said that *"in our community, community leaders also provide needy families with food parcels and RDP Houses to fight the problem of poverty."* Teacher participants indicated that some churches award trophies and cash vouchers to high achievers in schools. All these moves encourage students to continue studying.

The researcher asked teachers who participated in the study to reveal the weaknesses of the methods used by community or village leaders to reduce learner drop outs from schools. Teachers indicated that although the community or village leaders are using some methods such as giving food parcels and RDP Houses to needy families, community leaders steal these items or give those essentials to the wrong people who do not deserve then, or they even sell the food parcels and the RDP Houses to foreigners.

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It was also a concern to the participants that people in the community are involved in selling drugs and alcohol to learners. They indicated that some community leaders sell traditional liquor (*Mahafhe*) to students in quest to get money to support their families, and by so doing cripple the lives of these learners.

Respondents indicated that interventions such as food given to learners at school, as well as sports, were appropriate strategies that kept learners from dropping out of the school system. The respondents, however, indicated that corporal punishment and lack of parental involvement in their children's education were the main causes of learners dropping out of learners dropping out of school. It was also indicated that there was need to relook at the policy of the pregnant learners as it was challenging to implement.

4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented data collected from 70 sampled participants for the study. Participants comprised of 20 school learners, 20 school dropouts, 10 SGB members and 20 teachers from two schools found in the Tshilamba rural community. Through the data gathered and

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presented the researcher identified the causes of learners dropping out of school in South African rural schools, in particular Tshilamba rural community. The researcher in this study, examined the strategies which schools use to prevent school drop-outs in South African rural high schools. The strengths and weaknesses of the strategies that schools use to prevent school drop-outs in South African rural high schools were scrutinised and discussed. The next chapter summarises and discusses the findings of the study.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data gathered from selected participants. This chapter presents the study findings based on focus group interviews. The chapter also discusses the findings of the study.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to examine the intervention strategies that rural high schools used in order to curb the problem of learners dropping out of school in South Africa. The study focused on Tshilamba circuit in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

The study sought to identify the causes of learners dropping out of school in South African rural schools. It examined the strategies which schools use to prevent school drop-outs in South African rural high schools and scrutinised and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies that schools use to prevent school drop-outs in South African rural high schools.

In this study, the researcher used interviews to solicit information on the problem of school drop outs in Tshilamba circuit in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents in this qualitative study. The findings of the study are presented and discussed next.

5.3 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study examined the intervention strategies that rural high schools use to curb the problem of students dropping out of school in Tshilamba circuit in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The research unveiled a number of issues on school dropouts in the South African education system. The major findings of the study are presented below.

5.3.1 Causes of learner drop outs

The causes of school drop-outs in South African high schools were identified in this study. Literature related to this study revealed that learners drop out of school as a result of school related problems such as not liking school, being suspended or being expelled and also because of social issues such as poverty and child headed families. The main reason for dropping out of school were as follows: repeating grades; falling pregnant; working more

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than 20 hours outside the school; having low reading test scores; having parents who did not finish high school; and having a low self-concept compared to students who do not drop out of school. In addition, high school drop-outs had lower rates of homework completion, low educational expectations, and a more externalised sense of self-control (Santrock, 1993; Rumberger, 1997; Govender, 2012).

The study unveiled the main causes of learner dropouts in the rural communities around Tshilamba circuit. It was revealed by the participants that the majority of the youth dropped out of school as a result of the unfriendly school environment. Some learners complained that they were treated unfairly by their teachers because of their family backgrounds or because they were not doing well in their studies.

This study also revealed that lack of school resources such as text books and poor building structures also influenced some students to drop out of school. Despite all these, some youth decided to drop out of school because they were being bullied by other learners. The researcher concludes that if the school environment is not safe and friendly to a learner, it drives the learner to drop out of school.

The study found out that some of the girls had dropped out of school because of teenage pregnancy. Colemand and Hagel (2007:70) reveal that there are some who fall pregnant as a result of liberal school policies which allow pregnant girls and mothers to stay enrolled at school and also because the child support grant offered in South Africa encouraged them to fall pregnant (Grant and Hallman, 2006).

5.3.2 Prevention Strategies

The study examined the strategies which schools use to prevent school drop-outs in South African rural high schools. Intervention strategies used to curb learner drop outs in South African high schools were cited in literature related to the study as counseling, especially with regards to personal and family challenges such as teenage pregnancy or parent-child conflicts. Remedial and tutorial services meant to reduce academic obstacles and the general creation of a safe and child-friendly school environment were also cited in literature as appropriate intervention strategies which could curb high learner dropout rates in South Africa (Sadker & Sadker, 1991).

The findings of the study on the strategies used in South African rural high schools to prevent the problem of learners dropping out revealed that, in a good and safe school teaching and

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learning environment, learners, teachers and parents are free to participate in decision making processes. The stakeholders take part in making decisions on policies and how they should be implemented (UNICEF, 2008). Thus, when learners feel that they are accepted and belong, they engage more in school activities and do well in their academic.

Parental involvement was cited as the best strategy that the schools and parents can use, in order to reduce the problem of learner dropouts. Teachers, including teachers, indicated that if both parents and the school work collaboratively, students will focus and succeed in school.

This means that, where parents fail to encourage their children to get involved in education of their children financially, psychologically, and emotionally, children tend to drop out of school. This is reflected by Bryk and Thum (1989); Mcneal (1999) and Rumberger (2001) who believed that children whose parents who provide encouragement and stability that is vital to children's success and continue to stay at school.

The findings of the study revealed that, the 'capitation grant' or no fee schools and the school feeding schemes help to retain students. This is unlike before where students from poor families were expected to pay school fees and feed themselves during break time. Moess (2007) stated that the introduction of the capitation grant and the school feeding in 2005 scheme increased enrolment in primary and junior high schools by 17%. Literature has shown that these capitation grants and feeding schemes attracted many children to enrol in schools, even those who had previously dropped-out because of fees (Sabates, Akyeapong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010). This indicates that were there is free education and food to eat, children tend to come to school.

The researcher found that in order to reduce the problem of grade retention (repeating grades) which leads to learners dropping out, most schools are using diverse ways of teaching, in order to investigate and address learning difficulties and to enable all learners to achieve better results. This is in line with Landsberg, Kruger and Nel's (2010) study which revealed that the main aim of remedial specialists is, generally, to rectify learners short-comings or failings and to accelerate the learners development or to address specific problems and weaknesses in the learners.

5.3.3 Strengths and weaknesses on the strategies

The research found that many of the school-going age children are no longer going to school due to corporal punishment. However, the researcher discovered that, in almost all South

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African high schools corporal punishment is still being used. The norm is that corporal punishment should be used in accordance with an agreement between the specific school and the parents, but there is no monitoring system to ensure that this is done properly.

The study revealed that it is important to involve parents in their children's learning as this will encourage them. Parents will guide and counsel learners to complete their twelfth grade thus, reducing the problem of learner drop outs. In instances where parents do not participate financially in the education of their children, psychologically and emotionally learners are likely to drop out of school.

According to Myer and Myer (1990), in schools where there is a positive relationship between students and teachers, the dropout rate is lower but in schools where there is a negative relationship between teachers and students, there are high dropout rates since students feel that they are not being unaccepted or are being ignored.

5.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The first limitation concerns the sample. There was a problem of identifying adolescents who had dropped out of school. Since these were people who were not easy to locate as they had left school, the researcher had to rely on those whom she knew, and who were conveniently accessible to her, for example, such as her former pupils and those who communicated with her in the community. The limited number of sampled schools was meant to enable the researcher to visit the sampled schools and obtain detailed descriptions of valuable information. This resulted in the study being limited to only two schools that were easily accessible the researcher because of the minimal travel and other costs.

The other limitation was that some of the teachers were reluctant to be tape recorded even after signing the consent form. The researcher had to explain and assure the respondents that the information collected was strictly for academic purposes. This created a bit of mistrust, which might have made some of the teachers to conceal some valuable information. The small sample size, in this case study, may imply that, although the study results may be valid and reliable, they may not necessarily be generalised to all types of South African schools. This is so, especially in view of the fact that the two schools rural schools, whereas the country has other types of schools such as urban schools.

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5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the over-view of the study, major findings of the study as well as the limitation of the study. Conclusions and recommendations from the study are presented in the next chapter (chapter 6).

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONSFROM THE STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted in Tshilamba circuit in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The study explained the intervention strategies employed by schools to curb school drop-outs. The main objective of the study was to identify the nature and examine the effectiveness of the intervention strategies used to prevent drop-out of learners at South African rural high schools. The research objectives set in this study were achieved through the review of literature and the data collected from SGB members, teachers, learners and school dropouts.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY

The conclusions of the study are categorised into the following two segments:

6.2.1Prevalence and causes of learner dropout

The study revealed that between 2010 and 2012, grades 10 and 11 had higher learner drop-out rates than grade 12 at both schools where this study was conducted. It was also revealed by the study that more learners above 18 years of age dropped out of school. Since grades 10 and 11 had more dropouts than grade 12, it would seem to suggest that older learners in grades 10 and 11 dropped out of school more than those who were younger and were at the correct age for these grades. The causes of learner drop-out, according to study participants, ranged from lack of fees, poverty, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of parental monitoring, especially for those who stayed with grand-parents and in child-headed families.

6.2.2 Intervention strategies to learner drop-out

The study concluded that there are intervention strategies that rural high schools in Tshilamba use in order to reduce the problem of learner drop-outs. The strategies included:

- Creating a safe and friendly school environment;
- Prevention programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy;
- Parental involvement in the education of their children;
- School capitation grant and school feeding scheme programmes;
- Remedial education and increasing the number of sporting and recreation programmes,
- Abolition of corporal punishment;

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- Extramural and co-curricular activities and
- Provision of vocational guidance and counselling.

The study also concluded that the intervention strategies used to curb the problem of school drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit need to be improved since there were some noted weaknesses in the strategies that are currently being used. It was also concluded that collaboration between the community and the school is one major way to fight the problem of school drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit high schools.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STUDY PARTICIPANTS

After interviewing and recording views from different stake holders on the problem of school drop-outs, the researcher sought to find out what strategies different stakeholders recommended for curbing the problem. Learners, teachers, school drop outs and SGB members had similar ideas regarding what should be done to curb the problem of school drop outs.

6.3.1Learners' recommendations to improve intervention strategies to minimise the number of school drop-outs

The study sought views from the learners on what parents should do to prevent their children from dropping out of school. One participant who goes to school B said that *"Parents should make sure that their children are going to school, should support their children, physically, mentally and financially"* Another female member from school B said that:*"Parents should also visit schools in order to find out from the teachers what are problems countered at school and how learners are learning"* a participant from the same school also said that: *"Parents should motivate, and check the assessment tasks done by learners"*.

Learner participants were also asked to suggest what people in the community or village should do to prevent children from dropping out of school. The majority of the participants stated that the owners of bar-lounges and bottle stores should not sell drugs and alcohol to learners and children under the age of 18 years. A female learner participant from school B indicated that:*"Pastors and traditional leaders should also spread the gospel of anti– drugs"*. The suggestion from the quotation is that the problem of school drop outs affects the whole community. Hence, all stakeholders in the community should work towards eradicating the problem by addressing its causes.

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6.3.2 Out-of-school children's recommendations on intervention strategies to minimise the number of school drop-outs

Learner drop outs were asked to suggest what should be done to solve the problem of learner drop out of school. The majority of the participants suggested that learners who are at risk of dropping out of school should be identified early and that solutions to their problems should be found to prevent them from dropping out. Participants also indicated that of regular assessment and motivation should be encouraged to prevent grade retention since most of the drop outs leave school because they would have to repeat a grade. Gleanson and Dynarsic (2002), in their study, show that grade retention is the most powerful predictor of future drop-outs, followed by excessive absence, and a frequent change of schools.

A female dropout participant who was at school B stated that: *"Parents should involve themselves in the education of their children"*. The same participant also suggested that counselling programmes are also ideal for curbing the problem of learner drop outs. Another female dropout participant who was in school B said that: *"If I have done something wrong at school I must be called in together with my parents in order to settle the problem."*From the above quotations, it is clear that learner drop-outs believe that involving parents in the schooling of their children may prevent learners from dropping out of school.

Participants indicated that even though some strategies were applied by the school, they were not good enough. One of the female drop-out said that: *"There could have been someone from the Department of Education to come and motivate us"*. This means that learners need a role model from their community to look up to.

Masipa (2012) noted that in some South African rural high schools, students have to seat on the floor, while others use rubbish bins as chairs. Participants also suggested a proper school structure which is conducive to learning as well as an equal distribution of resources to keep learners at school. According to Sifile (2012), the late delivery of text books in the rural areas of Limpopo Province, some with missing pages, and pupils being forced to use umbrellas for protection from the rain even inside the classroom, are issues that force learners to dropout.

A Female drop-out suggested that: *"There should be special meetings between the school and the parents of those children who are at risk of dropping out of school, to try and solve the*

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problem." This means that the school and the parents need to work together to ensure that learners' school problems are solved to avoid learner drop outs.

6.3.3 SGBs members' recommendations on intervention strategies to minimise the number of school drop-out

SGB members were asked to state what they thought could be done to reduce the problem of learner drop outs. Participants in this category identify the following stakeholders as crucial in solving the problem: School administration, teachers, community leadership and the Department of Education.

6.3.3.1 Recommendations for school administration

Responding to what should be done by the school administration to reduce the problems of learners dropping out of school; SGB participants indicated that school administrators, during their meetings, should enlighten both parents and their children on the value of education. A female participant who is also a member of the SGB advised that: *"the school administrators should encourage learners to remain at school until they complete grade 12".*

6.3.3.2 Recommendations for teachers

On the issue of what should be done by teachers to reduce the problem of learners dropping out of school, an angry participant, who is a member of the SGB from one of the sampled schools, shared that: *"teachers should treat all learners equally".* Boyer (1990) who noted that students prefer a teacher who treats them equally and with respect. A mutual or positive relationship influences learner engagement in schools.

6.3.3.3 Recommendations for parents

SGB members were also asked what they thought parents should do to reduce the problem of children who are dropping out of school. The participants indicated that parents should be involved in the education of their children as well as provide basic needs for them. A participant from school B stated that:

> *Whenever a parent finds out that his or her child is not at school during school hours, he/she should go to school to find out why he or she is not at school like others". This would be a way of showing concern over what is happening to the child's education* (Participant from school B).

It is vital for learners' education that parents be involved in the education of their children. Parents should provide all the needs of their children, including educational needs.

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6.3.3.4 Recommendations for community leadership

Members of the SGB were also asked to point out what they thought the community or village leaders should do to curb the problem of learner drop outs. Participants indicated that community leaders should make sure that during *Imbizos or Khoro*, where the community meet to sought out issues and problems affecting their lives, they should take the opportunity to encourage parents to inform their children about the value of education and the danger of being uneducated. A female SGB member from school A also indicated that: *"... children, who are under the age of 18 and all those of school going age, should not be allowed to stay at home while others are at school"*. A male SGB member from school B also pointed out that, *"Community leaders should also encourage the young adult parents to engage themselves in Adult Based Educational Training (ABET) so that they can be able to monitor their children's school work"*. It was recommended that community leadership should employ strategies that would prevent learners from dropping out of school.

The SGB members also had views on what they could do, in order to reduce the problem of children who drop out of school. Participants indicated that SGBs, should work with the school and community to encourage learners not to drop out. One of the participants from the SGBs was quoted saying: *"The awareness campaign should be there to awaken the community* to the value *of education as well as the danger of being uneducated*" An education awareness campaign was also suggested by the participants.

6.3.4.5 Educators' recommendations for school governing bodies.

The teachers who participated in this study stated that the school governing body should encourage learners to go to school and complete their grade 12. The teacher participants also suggested that giving the best learners incentives would motivate them to stay at school.

6.3.4.6 Recommendations for the Department of Education

Suggestions from SGB members on what the Department of Education should do to reduce the problem of school drop outs also included the department providing resources enough for all schools all over the country. The issue of an incident where schools in Limpopo did not receive text books on time in 2012 while other provinces in urban areas received their text books resurfaced.

Participants also indicated that the government should build and repair schools. This is reflected by Sifile (2012) who noted that, in Mningisi high school in Mningisi village a

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village in South Africa, all the classrooms have large holes on the floor and no windows and that sometimes led to pupils being injured.

6.3.4. Educators' recommendations on intervention strategies to minimise the number of school drop-outs

Teachers who participated in this study were asked to suggest what they thought should be done by the other stakeholders involved in the education of learners to reduce the problem of learner drop outs. The following suggestions were made:

6.3.4.1Educators' recommendations for school administration

Teachers suggested that school administrators should change the school climate so that it can be conducive to learning. Participants also indicated that a school climate which is not conducive to learning can force learners to drop out of school. One of the female participants said that: *"the school administrators should be able to identify learners who are at risk of dropping out of school and provide them with their personal needs"*. Reed and Bergermann (1995) stated that the most satisfying schools are the ones with favourable conditions for learning and those that also cater for the needs of learners.

6.3.4.2 Educators' recommendations for teachers

The study sought to find out what should be done by teachers to reduce the problem of school drop outs. Participants indicated that teachers should identify learners with learning problems and those who are at risk of dropping out of school, counsel them or even refer them to professional counsellors if they are unable to solve those learners' problems. One of the female participants also stated that: *"Caring for the learners are the best methods for preventing student wastage through school drop outs"*. The majority of the participants stated that there is need for teachers, to give learners every chance of success in the classroom through interactive and experimental teaching methodologies, as this can reduce the rate of learner drop-outs.

Swanson (2010) argues that learners prefer caring teachers who are able to encourage them to participate in class and succeed. A male participant who is a also a teacher from school B indicated that *"teachers should refrain from calling learners names or telling them that they would not achieve because there is no one in their family who has grade 12"*. What is important is to encourage good relationship between teachers and learners.

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A participant who is a teacher from school A also indicated that teachers should explain or tell these learners the value of education, as well as the danger of being uneducated in life as a whole". The issue of teachers giving learners more assessment tasks and regular feedback was also mentioned by the participants as a strategy that could help reduce the rate of learner drop outs.

6.3.4.3 Educators' recommendations for parents/families

Teacher participants indicated that parents or the family should be part of their children's education through regular involvement. Teachers who participated in this study indicated that parents and families of learners should meet the needs of their children, for example, giving them money for trips and facilities that are needed for their schooling.

One female participant who is also a teacher in school A said that *"Parents should be involved in the education of their children"*. Parents or guardians need to check how their schools functions in terms of enhancing the education of their children. The participant believed that parental involvement can help to reduce the high rate of learners drop out of school. These results correlate with those of Rumberger (2001), which reveal that parents can provide encouragement and stability that is vital to children success.

6.3.4.3 Educators' recommendations for community leaders

The respondents also shared views on what they thought community or village leaders should do to reduce the problem of learner drop-outs. The participants noted that the community or village leaders should encourage children to go to school. One of the female participants from school B also stated that:

> *...imbizo or awareness campaigns should be conducted where children of school going age and their parents should be taught about the value of education to individual, families, communities and the state. The dangers of not being educated should also be fully explained to the learners or children (*Female teacher from school B).

6.3.4.6 Educators' recommendations for school governing bodies (SGBs)

The teachers who participated in this study stated that the school governing body should encourage learners to go to school and complete their grade 12. Teacher participants also suggested that giving the best learners incentives would motivate them to stay at school.

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6.3.4.7 Educators' recommendations to Department of Education

The teachers who participated in this study expressed their views concerning what they thought the Department of Education should do to reduce the rate of learner drop out. Participants indicated that the Department of Education must be fair and upgrade all schools, especially those that have poor buildings which are built with mud bricks.

A teacher participant from school A said that: *"the Department of Education should provide all schools, whether in rural or urban areas, with equal facilities and resources"*. The other issue that was raised by a teacher from school B was that of the placement of teachers, *"in some schools, presently, there are no teachers for specific subjects. This can also lead to learner wastages"*. The department should ensure that the school environment is conducive for teaching and learning to take place.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE RESEARCHER

The following recommendations based on the research findings were suggested:

6.4.1 Recommendations for Policy Makers

The researcher recommends that there should be an awareness campaign to educate the school learners and the community about the dangers of being uneducated citizens. The campaign should touch on the following issues:

- Sex education and the use of contraceptives;
- ABET centres to educate parents who dropped out of school before completing grade 12 so that they can monitor the school tasks of their children and encourage them.

It is also recommended that the number of bottle stores round the school and the churches should be reduced. It is also recommended that there should be an equal distribution of educational resources and facilities to all schools regardless of their location.

Workshops on parental involvement are also recommended, in order to equip parents with the required knowledge on how to participate in their children's education. The school feeding scheme programme should be made available to all schools around the area. Bursaries for the needy learners should be made available to encourage those who are from poor families to stay in school.

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6.4.2 Recommendation to the Teaching Profession

This study was a case study of the Tshilamba District schools. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all South African Districts. However, information obtained, in this study, CAN be used in similar cases. It is recommended that teachers should teach learners about the dangers of being uneducated. Furthermore, it is also recommended that teachers should refrain from using corporal punishment.

It is also recommended that there should be mutual understanding (relationship) between the teachers and students so as to reduce the problem of learner drop-outs. It is also recommended that teachers should change their negative attitude of treating learners unequally since this increase the problems of learner drop-outs.

Furthermore remedial education should be utilised by all teachers as it will help teachers identify learners who are at risk of dropping out of school and encourage them to work harder so that they can match their counter parts.

The study also recommends that teachers should involve parents in the learning of their children. Teachers should inform parents about the performance and the behaviour of their children at school so that unbecoming behaviour may be detected and curbed before the children drops out of school.

Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers should accept all learners and show concern in their school work, give them unconditional love and accept them as individuals so that the problem of learner drops-outs is reduced.

6.4.3 Recommendations for Further Studies

The researcher recommends that further studies on the topic under investigation should be conducted, in order to reduce the high drop-out rates and learner wastage. There should be enough time and funds given for the new researchers to collect data.

6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the findings of this study, there is clear evidence that there are some intervention strategies that South African rural high schools have employed to reduce learner drop-outs. The strategies encompass creating a safe and friendly school environment, prevention programmes to curb teenage pregnancy, parental involvement in the education of their children, school capitation grant and school feeding scheme programmes, remedial education,

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increasing sporting and recreation programmes, abolition of corporal punishment, extramural and co-curricular activities, and provision of vocational guidance and counselling.

The study revealed some strength in the intervention strategies. The strengths noted were such as government intervention in providing capitation grants and the nutrition programme as well as the abolition of corporal punishment. All stakeholders involved in the education of the learners have a duty to play in preventing learners from dropping out.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

University of Venda

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION:

Department of Early Childhood Education

MEMORANDUM

To : The Manager, Vhembe District/Tshilamba Circuit

From : Dr T. Runhare

Date : 23 October 2012

Request for permission to gather statistical data on drop-outs in Tshilamba Circuit: M.Ed Student: Vele, T.M.(11575087).

Reference is made to the above request:

1. Ms.M.T.Vele, who is doing a Masters in Education (M. Ed) student and is a teacher in Tshilamba circuit, is at the stage of gathering data for her dissertation.
2. Her research topic is on **Intervention strategies for learner drop-out in rural South African high schools.**
3. She has chosen to carry out her field work in Tshilamba circuit.

I humbly request your office to grant her permission to collect data on learner drop-outs in the circuit.

She will abide by the set regulations of the circuit management on the conduct of research.

I believe that, although this study is for her academic needs, its results will be of value to the circuit.

Thank you in anticipation.

_____

Dr T. Runhare

(A/HOD and Research supervisor)

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Appendix 2: University of Venda Research Approval

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

TO : MR/MS T.M VELE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

FROM: PROF X.G. MBHENYANE
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

DATE : 28 MAY 2013

DECISIONS TAKEN BY UHDC OF 28 MAY 2013

Application for approval of Master's research proposal in Education: **T. M. Vele: 11575087**

Topic: *"An Examination of Intervention Strategies for Learner Drop-Out in Rural South African High Schools: A case Study of Tshilamba Circuit"*.

Supervisor: Dr. T. Runhare
Co-Supervisor: Dr. N.P. Mudzielwana

UHDC approved Master's proposal

Prof X.G. Mbhenyane
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic

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Appendix 3: DoE Permission to research in schools

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

TSHILAMBA CIRCUIT

Ref:82191191
Enq: Tshisudzungwane E.R

VeleT. M.
University of Venda
Private Bag 5050
Thohoyandou

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS UNDER TSHILAMBA CIRCUIT: YOURSELF.

1. The above matter bears reference.
2. Your application for permission to conduct research in schools under Tshilamba Circuit on the topic **"INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LEARNER DROP-OUT IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS"**, has been approved.
3. You are kindly requested to observe the following conditions:
   3.1 Inform the principals of affected Schools prior to your visits.
   3.2 Ensure that your interactions with participating principals, teachers and learners do not disrupt teaching and learning activities.
4. Wishing you the best in your academic endeavours.

.....
CIRCUIT MANAGER: TSHILAMBA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TSHILAMBA CIRCUIT
31/10/2012
DATE:

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Appendix 4: Example of signed participants consent former

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INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICPANTS

Introduction

My name is Mrs M.T Vele and I am a student at the University of Venda carrying out research on **how schools in rural communities in Tshilamba area are doing to reduce the number of learners who drop out from school.**

I am inviting you to volunteer to take part in the research by expressing your own views on what is happening at your school on this issue.

For you to make a proper decision on whether to take part in the study or not, I wish to give you full information on what the study is about and how you will be involved. Should you have any questions, please feel free to ask. You can also phoning me on 0720629269. You are reminded that you are not forced to take part in the study and that you should not agree to take part until you fully understand what the research is all about

What is the purpose of the study?

The main purpose of the study is to gather the views of teachers, learners, members of the school governing bodies and children who dropped from school on **how schools in rural communities in Tshilamba area are doing to reduce the number of learners who drop out from school.** The information that will be gathered from you will be used to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies the schools are using in order to suggest how they can be improved.

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How will you participate in the study?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked some few and share your views in a group discussion of about 6 to 8 other people similar to you. The group discussion will take about one hour. The discussion will not be a test and therefore all the views expressed will be taken as correct because there are many ways of looking at anything by different people.

What are your rights as a research participant?

Your decision to take part in this study is totally voluntary or up to you. This means you are free to refuse to take part in the study if you have some doubts or think that this could leave you disturbed. Further, should you agree to take part but change your mind later, you are allowed to withdrawal yourself from the study without being asked to give reasons.

What are the risks for your participation in the study?

Since you shall only be answering questions on the topic being studied, there will be no foreseeable physical injuries that could result from your participation. However, you are reminded that the ideas you will express will be known by the other people in your focus group discussion. You should therefore not say out any information about yourself that you do not want to share with other people or that could leave you feeling disturbed. If you think that such information is important to this study, you can write and give it to me without indicating your name.

How will your personal privacy and confidentiality be protected?

As already mentioned, you will not be asked to talk about your private life but to express your views on what is happening at your school on learners who drop out of school.

All views gathered in the study will be handled in a strictly confidential or secret manner. First, you will not be allowed to say your name throughout the discussion and no names will be mentioned in the report for the study. Second, the gathered information will only be used for this study and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised people. Lastly, all participants will have a chance to check the information as the two participating schools will be given a copy.

Has the study got approval from authorities?

Permission to carry out this research in schools was granted by the University of Venda's Higher Degrees Committee and the Department of Education, Vhembe District Senior

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Management. However, this does not mean that you should take part in the study if you don't wish to.

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION FORM

In terms of the ethical requirements of the University of Venda, I now request you to complete this form as an indication of your voluntary choice and acceptance to take part in this study.

I _____ hereby confirm that I have been fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and activities of the study. The benefits and any risks of my participation have been fully explained to me. I have fully understood what this study is all about. I was given full opportunity to ask any questions and I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the study at any stage and time without giving any reasons.

I therefore hereby freely **Give/Do not give** my consent to participate in this study **(Delete the inapplicable).**

Principal Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Learner Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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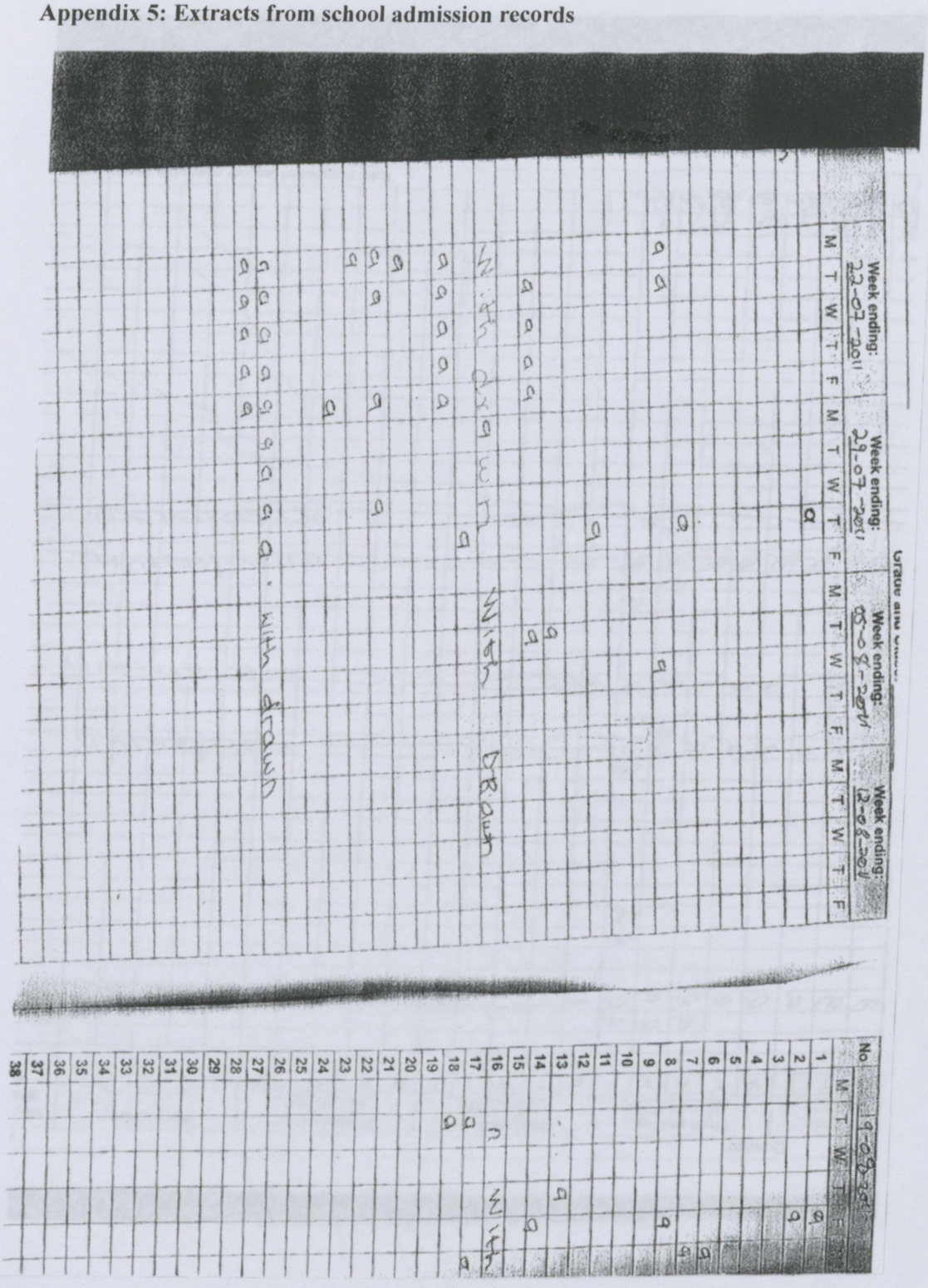
Appendix 5: Extracts from school admission records



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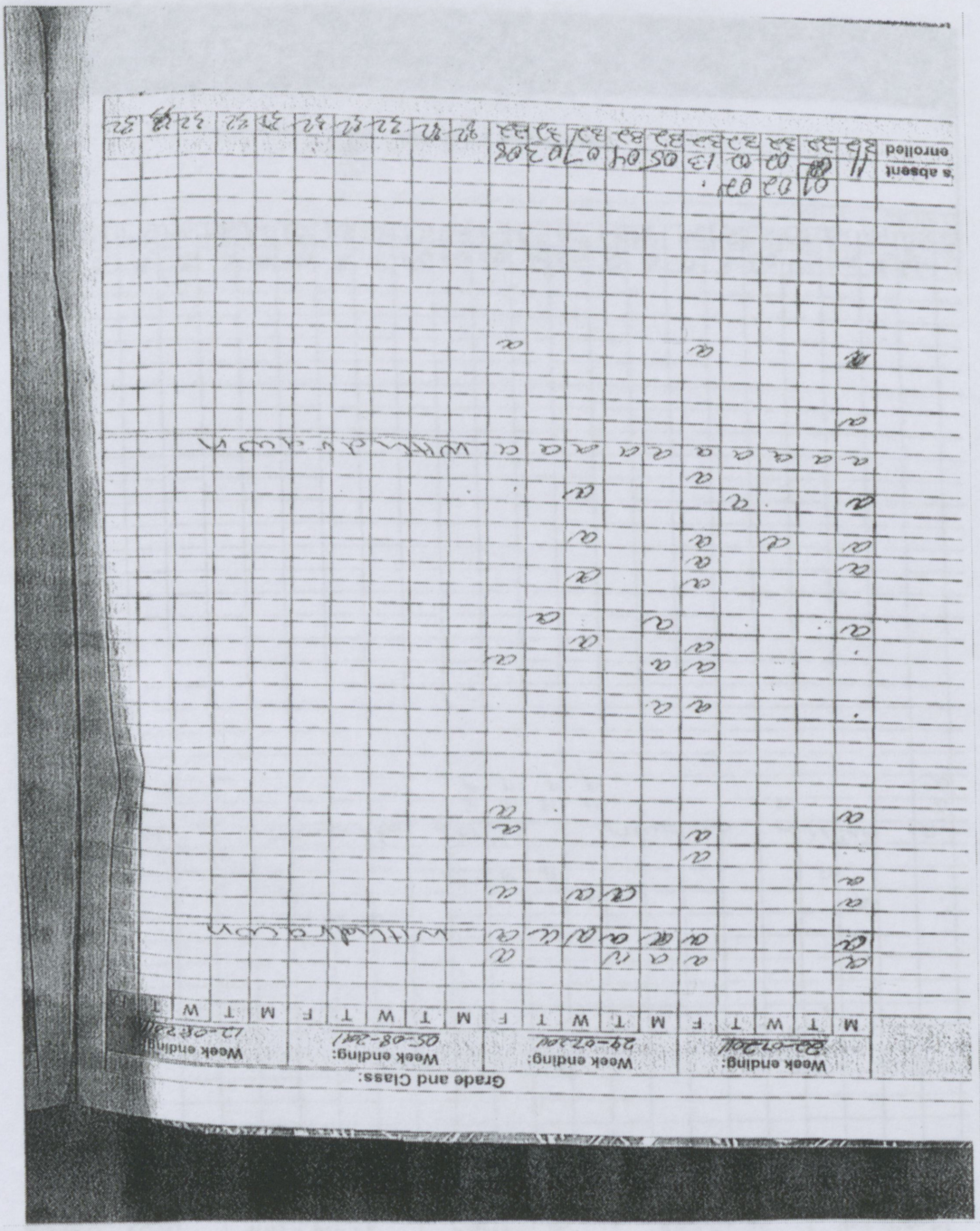

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Class teacher's signature:

Quarter:

Week ending: 19-23 April					Week ending: 26-30 April					Week ending: 02-07 May					Week ending: 09-14 May					Week ending: 16-20
T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F	M	T

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APPENDIX 6

A.FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR IN-SCHOOL LEARNERS

INTRODUCTION

My name is Vele Tsumbedzo Maria. I am an educator and am carrying outa research on school drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit. I wish to start by thanking you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Please feel free to say anything. However, should you feel that there are certain things you do not want to say in the presence of others, you can write and forward them to me after the discussion. Remember, the views expressed here are only going to be used for this study and there are no wrong answers. Also, you do not have to say who you are because only your ideas and not your name are important.

Thank you for your time.

1. Are there some learners in your class that dropped out of school this year?
2. Are the children who are not going to school in your village?
3. What do you think are the main reasons why some of these children in your village are not at school?
4. What do you think are the reasons why they dropped from school?
5. What in your view are the main reasons in the home or family that cause some learners to drop out of school?
6. What do you think the parents should do to prevent their children from dropping out of school?
7. What in your view are the main reasons in the community which can cause some learners to drop out of school?
8. Mention what you think the people in your community or village should do to prevent children from dropping out of school?
9. Mention some of the things that people in your community or village are doing to prevent children from dropping out of school?
10. Mention some of the things that your school is doing to prevent learners from dropping out of school.
11. List the things that you think the school is not doing to prevent learners from dropping out of school.
12. Mention the things that you think teachers at your school are doing to prevent learners from dropping out of school.
13. Also list the things that you think teachers at your school do to cause learners to drop out of school.
14. List the things that you think some learners at your school do to cause other learners to drop out of school.
15. List all the methods that you think are used to prevent learners from dropping out of school.
16. List what you think is good about the methods used by your school to prevent learners from dropping out of school.
17. List what you think is not good about the methods used by your school to prevent learners from dropping out of school.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND IDEAS

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B. KEY PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH SCHOOL DROP- OUTS

INTRODUCTION

My name is Vele Tsumbedzo Maria. I am an educator and at the same time a studying the topic on school drop-out in Tshilamba circuit. I wish to start by thanking you for accepting to take part in this discussion. Please feel free to say anything. However, should you feel that there are certain things you do not want to say in the presence of others, you can write and forward to me after the discussion. Remember the views expressed here are only going to be used for this study and there are no wrong answers. Also, you do not have to say who you are because only the ideas and not your name are important.

Thank you for your time

1. Do you know other children who have dropped out from school in your village?
2. What are they doing now?
3. How about yourself. What made you drop out of school?
4. Do you have friends who dropped out of school?
5. What are they doing now?
6. If given a chance, would you like to return to school? Give reasons for your answer.
7. When you look back what was it like to be at school before you drooped out?
8. What is it like being out of school? Explain.
9. Who are you staying with at home?
10. Using your own experience, what things within the school made you to drop out of school?
11. Describe your relationship with teachers while you were at school.
12. List the problems that you had as a learner at your school before you dropped out.
13. Were there any things that were done at your school to prevent learners from dropping out of school?
14. If yes, list these things.
15. If not, what do you suggest should have been done to prevent children like you from dropping out of school?
16. Give reasons why the things that are done by the school to prevent children from dropping out are not working.
17. What do you suggest should be done to solve the problem of learners who drop-out of school?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND IDEAS

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C. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH SGB MEMBERS

INTRODUCTION

My name is Vele Tsumbedzo Maria. I am an educator and am carrying out research on school drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit. I wish to start by thanking you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Please feel free to say anything. However, should you feel that there are certain things you do not want to say in the presence of others, you can write and forward them to me after the discussion. Remember, the views expressed here are only going to be used for this study and there are no wrong answers. Also, you do not have to say who you are because only young ideas and not your name are important.

Thank you for your time

1. Are there any children of school going age in your area who are no longer going to school?
2. Suggest the reasons why they are no longer going to school?
3. From your observation, who drops out of school more boys or girls?
4. Suggest reasons why more boys or girls drop out of school in your area?
5. What do you think are the causes within the family which make children to drop out of school?
6. What do you think are the causes within your school which make children to drop out of school?
7. What do such children usually do while others are at school?
8. In your view, is the issue of children who drop out of school a real problem in your area? Explain your answer.
9. As community representatives of parents, what do you do in your community or village to help reduce the number of children who drop out of school? Describe te strategies.
10. Describe the strengths of what the school is doing (methods) to reduce the problem of learner drop out of school?
11. Describe the weaknesses of what the school is doing (methods) to reduce the problem of learner drop out of school?
12. On the other hand, what do you think is not beingdone by yourselves but believe should be done by community representatives to help reduce the number of children who drop out of school?
13. As community representatives for parents on school matters, what is your school doing to reduce the number of children who drop out of school? Describe the strategies.
14. What do you think the school is not doing, which it should be doing to help reduce the number of children who drop out of school?

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D. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

My name is Vele Tsumbedzo Maria. I am an educator and am carrying out research on school drop-outs in Tshilamba circuit. I wish to start by thanking you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Please feel free to say anything. However, should you feel that there are certain things you do not want to say in the presence of others, you can write and forward them to me after the discussion. Remember, the views expressed here are only going to be used for this study and there are no wrong answers. Also, you do not have to say who you are because only your ideas and not your name are important.

Thank you for your time

1. Are you aware of any learners who have dropped out of your school this year?
2. From your observation, who drops out of school more, boys or girls?
3. What could be the reasons for the differences in drop-out rates between boys and girls?
4. Is learner drop-out a real problem at your school? Explain your answer.
5. What in your view are the main factors within your school that could cause some learners to drop out of school?
6. What is it that the school is not doing to reduce the number of learners dropping out?
7. What factors do you think are found in the family that can cause children to drop out of school?
8. What factors do you think are found in the community or village that can cause children to drop out of school?
9. What is your school doing to reduce the rate of learner drop-outs from school?
10. What is the community or village leaders doing to reduce the rate of learner drop out from school?
11. What are the strengths of the methods used by the school to reduce learner drop out rates in the school?
12. What are the weaknesses of the methods used by the school to reduce learner drop out from school?
13. What is your school doing to reduce the rate of learner drop outs rates fromthe school?
14. What are the strengths of the methods used by community/village leaders to reduce learner drop-out rates in the school?
15. What are the weaknesses of the methods used by community/village leaders to reduce learner drop-out rates in the school?
16. Do you know of any learners who returned to school after dropping out?
17. What do you think are the reasons that made them to return to school?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND IDEAS

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APPENDIX 7
DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF DROP-OUT BY YEAR AND GENDER

School: _____

Year		Males	Females	Totals
2008	Enrolment			
	Dropouts			
	Totals			
2009	Enrolment			
	Dropouts			
2010	Enrolment			
	Dropouts			
2012	Enrolment			
	Dropouts			
Grant Totals				

-

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difficulties from whatever source they may emanate and which hinder the normal educational development of students". According to Kapp (1991:53), remedial teaching is an "aid which is offered in a teaching context to certain children in whom specific learning problems have been identified". It is such children with learning difficulties who end up losing hope in schooling and dropout if they are not given remedial attention. Schools with viable remedial programmes are, therefore, more likely to minimise the chances of learner dropout.

Students are interested in a supportive atmosphere, which is conducive to learning. Therefore, Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) are of the view that students should be supported to circumvent barriers to achieving their learning potential. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) the aim of remedial specialist is, generally, to rectify the learners' short-comings or failings and to accelerate the learners' development or to address specific problems or weaknesses in the learner. Students, who are struggling, academically, need intensive remedial instruction in small classes that permit a warm and caring atmosphere, in order to overcome the negative psychological effects of school failure (Berk, 1996). Good academic remediation, good academic assistance must be combined with social support and special counselling so that struggling students do not contemplate absconding or leaving school.

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2.8.13 Student and peer level interventions

Some learners drop out of school due to peer pressure or influence from friends. Therefore, it is important to identify those students who are at risk of dropping out of school and intervene either as a group or individuals (Dupper1993 cited in Debra 2008:56).

After identifying these students, they should be protected and encouraged not to drop out of school (Debra 2008:86). According to Debra (2008:56), the following strategies can be used to reduce the rate of learner dropout in the South African rural high schools:

- Building academic skills;
- Developing and maintaining positive attitudes;
- Building learners' positive self-esteem;
- Encouraging positive attachment to the school; and
- Increasing school attendance and performance.

Despite all these strategies, the problem of learner drop-out has not been completely eradicated, especially in developing and low income communities such as those found in South Africa.

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